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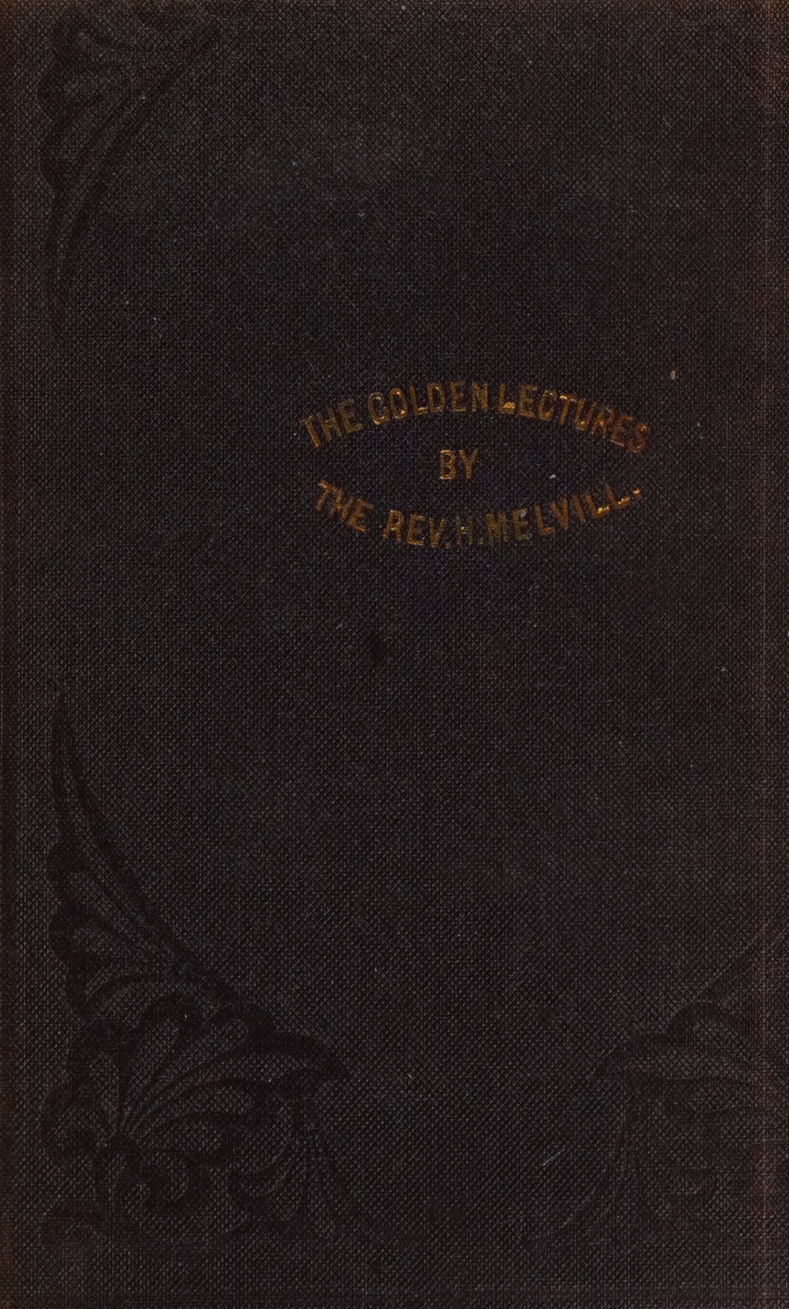

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FROM JANUARY 1, TO DECEMBER 23, 1856.

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.,

Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen;

Chaplain of the Tower, Principal of Haileybury College, and

Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.

(Selected from the Penny Pulpit.)

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jecture with tolerable accuracy what is likely to happen, it is conjecture at best, and as often disappointed as confirmed; while of the great mass of things with which coming days are charged, we cannot attain to the most distant intimation, not even a shadow being thrown over our path to give notice of what is approaching. You must all have often been desirous to penetrate the future, and we must all have felt what a power it would give us of settling our plans, of averting danger, and of securing advantages, if we could but look beyond the day, and foresee what would happen to our purposes and endeavours; and just through our utter ignorance of to-morrow, we are too, ignorant of so much of bitter disappointment, of so many designs frustrated, and so many hopes blighted. Only take away this ignorance, remove only in a measure the impervious veil which is hung before us, and which recedes towards eternity at the same rate as we advance, and we shall be able we think, to prepare for what shall happen, for the occurrences of life, and the solemnities of death. This is unquestionably a common feeling, but is it a correct? In the matter, for example, of death, would there be more preparedness for departing out of life, were men quite aware of the time of their departure? Our Lord seems to answer this question in our text, and to answer it in the affirmative. He puts the case of a householder whose house had been broken through, because he did not know at what hour it would be attacked; but who would certainly have resisted the robber could he only have known at what hour, and in what watch the robber would have come. Now take the householder as figuring the generations of the world, and the breaking up of this household, the dislocation of existing systems, which is to take place at the second coming of Christ; and then the representation certainly is, that were God only to make known the day and the hour of the mighty catastrophe, the world would be prepared for it, and not be found sleeping. Or take the householder as figuring any individual, and the breaking up of his house that demolition of the earthly house of this tabernacle, which is effected at death, and then as certainly the representation is, that if man were informed as to when he must die, in place of being left in the present utter uncertainty, he would take more pains to prepare himself for the solemn event. Nay, it might almost be argued from the statement of our Lord, that there would be no such thing as dying in actual impenitence, were men but informed of the time, as well as of the fact of dissolution. The householder forewarned, would not have suffered his house to be broken through. At all events, it cannot be disputed that a very great degree of preparation for death is given as a consequence of perfect acquaintance with the time of its occurrence, so that there would be far less of that hurried and uncared for departure out of life which is unhappily so frequent under the present arrangement. I know thoroughly well, that there is no need of any divination in order to the knowledge that there are numbers amongst you who have practically no sense of their mortality, and on whom the fact that they have only a short time to live can scarcely be said to exert any influence, so that their conduct would not be perceptibly different were they possessed of a charter which secured them against death. It seems to matter nothing that demonstrations of the shortness and uncertainty of life, are both continually and painfully given, so that every day forces evidence on the attention, and often through the heart's warmest feelings, that they are but sojourners below, and liable at any moment to be summoned to another state of being. There is a power in man of putting from him all this evidence, as though it were meant for others rather than for himself, and that too, not by any violent exertion, but rather without any perceivable effort; for unless it be in some extraordinary instances, there are no means required of resisting conviction as to liability to death. Means are needed to the producing and preserving that conviction. Men have but to let things take their course, and though thousands should fall at their side, they will not be more persuaded of exposure to danger. And if, in addressing these men who live as though secured against death, we could tell them precisely when they must die, in place of having only to argue that they may die at any instant, should we be likely to speak with more effect and might we reckon on producing such a preparation for death, that men everywhere might be ready to depart. Yes, we can quite believe this. It is the uncertainty as to the time which produces inattentiveness to the fact. A man who is visited by a disease which he knows to be incurable, is generally disposed to apply himself to the duties of religion. The man whom the law has sentenced to death on a fixed day, at a fixed hour, is commonly open to the admonitions of the preacher. And, therefore, we can readily suppose that the destroying altogether the existing uncertainty as to the time of your death, and the substituting for it an exact knowledge of the day, and the hour, would produce such a considering of your latter end as would strangely contrast with your present indifference. Beings, indeed, who were assured that they had yet many years to live would, in all likelihood, systematically defer attending to religion; and that, too, with an excuse to which they cannot now pretend for deferring the high duties of repentance and faith. It might be, as with the householder, who, sure that for a long time to come, no attack would be made upon his dwelling, would take no means of defence, but even leave the door open and his property exposed. As, however, the time fixed for the assault drew near, he would be active in defensive arrangements; guards would be set; bars would be strengthened, and the whole aspect be that of expectation and preparation. In like manner, so long as men know death to be distant, they might be, were it possible, even more engrossed with earth, than they now commonly are. Yet as that day was known to be approaching they would apply themselves, like the householder, to prepare for their safety, and evince a settled determination to be ready for an event which was now near and inevitable. And thus it may be that many would be saved from final destruction were it possible for every man to foresee the time of his death. It is because we can scarcely ever find you in such circumstances as to warrant the speaking of death as actually at hand that we fail in fixing your attention on the great things of eternity. You are always able to avoid our urgency by whispering to yourselves that there is no need for immediate attention; that it will be soon enough when the time comes to withdraw yourselves from the fascinations of earth. You do not come a jot nearer to "a more convenient season," because you do not seem to yourselves a jot nearer to the termination of life. You cannot fix a termination, and what is always involved in the same darkness will always be practically removed to the same distance. The whole thing would be altered if we could deal with one as having six months to live, and with another as having a-year. The "convenient season" would then be incontestibly fixed by the present; and unless the individual were determined—which is scarcely supposable—to go down without a struggle into everlasting burning, he would have no option but to commence forthwith, in order to be ready for the dreaded assault. And, oh, then with all our consciousness that there is great mercy in the concealment of the future, we cannot question that there would be far more preparation for death under an arrangement which gave notice when life would terminate, than under another which leaves it wholly uncertain. We feel that men who now depart in impenitence would be found with their lamps trimmed and their lights burning. Therefore, we assent to the truth of the representation, when accommodated to individuals as appointed to die—"If the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up."

Now, my brethren, if this be so, if there would indeed be greater preparation for death, were there greater certainty as to its time, the question which necessarily forces itself on our attention is—Why this greater acquaintance is withheld? Or, if the householder would not suffer his house to be broken up, were he but informed in what watch the thief would come; why should that Being who can wish nothing but the final good of his creatures—why should He fail to furnish the intelligence which would confessedly be so beneficial? We may not always think it well to endeavour to answer such questions. In many cases it is our wisdom simply to resolve, the matter into the sovereignty of God, and in place of endeavouring to remove every intricacy, to exclaim with the Saviour himself—"Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." But the matter of the concealment of the future does not require this; for though we may not be able to show why God draws a veil before coming days, we may certainly determine enough to induce us to be thankful rather than oppressed. For you must readily perceive that the character of the existing dispensation would be altogether changed were we enabled to foresee whatever could happen. It would no longer be a dispensation of faith; but a dispensation of sight. We should be called upon for the employing nothing of that dependence on the guidance and guardianship of the Invisible Being, which is demanded from us in our present condition; and which is not more pressed upon us by the circumstances of our being, than advantageous to our discipline as accountable creatures. It is evident enough that walking by faith is now better to us than would be walking by sight. We find it intensely difficult in our ignorance of the future to submit ourselves to God in whose hands we are. What would it be if we had acquaintance with the future, and so were in a measure independent, and could make our plans with certainty as to their issue? As it is, the great mass of the world is but a few degrees removed from practical atheism; and nothing could be more likely to lessen those few degrees than the giving every man such prescience as would leave no place for faith. And, then, how easy to perceive that telling us what would happen would cause immeasurably more of evil than of good. Who would take pains to educate a child, if he foresaw that he would educate him only for the grave? Or, if a child must die young, it would neutralize every endeavour to fit him for the active duties of life, and at the same time, it would embitter all the pleasure of his society. The parent would almost strive to keep himself from loving what he saw he must loose. Why give up the heart, when it would soon have to lose its object? Yea, what must be the dislocation, were the future so laid open as to be no longer expectation, no longer hope; were every man's history marked accurately out, and things to come were already things present! Oh, what a world would this then be, were the veil drawn back of which we are so often disposed to complain. If a man knew he must be a bankrupt, he would make no struggle against bankruptcy, but would sink under misfortune before it came to his portion. The wife would be a widow while her husband lived; the child would be an orphan while yet blessed with parents; if the funeral were foreknown, and the day of separation clearly revealed. And even the bright things of coming time would be darkened through being discovered. The event which now ministers to my happiness, would minister incomparably less, had I known for years past when and how it would occur. What decreases the province of hope, would necessarily greatly decrease the pleasure of possession. In regard then, equally, to what is prosperous and what is adverse, men would be losers by looking into futurity. I know they would be able to ward off certain calamities; but how many calamities would seem to be inevitable; and they would be pressing upon men before they happened, as well as darkening everything by their shadow before they came down in their light. I know they might administer much happiness; but alas, how small a proportion does enjoyed happiness bear to the expected. And, if men might not hope for more than they are to have, and could measure beforehand their portions, the brightest light would be darkened. And if to these considerations, you take into account another state of being, the goodness of the arrangement is a hundredfold more apparent. Though, as a general rule, the householder would be prepared, had he known at what hour the thief would come, I can still feel it immeasurably better that the day of death should be hidden from our eyes. What hold would religion have on a multitude who were thoroughly certain that they had twenty, thirty, or forty years to live? It may have but little hold now, but it has some. There are thousands who dare not be as bad as they wish, because constrained by the urgency of conscience; and this conscience would have no urgency to make its voice heard, were men assured that years must elapse ere God called them to give account of their actions. We hardly know what would follow upon informing every man when he should die, if not that the great body of those who, because secure of many years, would give themselves up to unbridled indulgence, so that evil would have a vastly accelerated sway, and society would become divided into the thousands who felt that they might go on a while longer as slaves to their passions, and the tens who were conscious that they had such a short time left that they must set themselves to resist. And, although the statement of our text obliges us to acknowledge that these tens would prepare themselves for the coming catastrophe, and that the thousands when brought into the circumstances of the tens, would alter their deportment, and attend to the securing of their houses; yet though there was this greater preparedness for death, the arrangement would be one which would produce greater licentiousness through life. The arrangement which best consists with the Divine attributes must be that which most tends to the repressing sin; to the keeping down amongst men those corrupt lusts which have only to be unrestrained, and the earth becomes turned into one vast pandemonium. It is not the saving of the greatest number of men which can be taken as deciding whether or not a dispensation is likely to be beneficial. That dispensation is to be expected which consists most with the attributes of God, and which, while it affords all such spiritual assistances as interfere not with human accountableness, deals with men as with beings who are free to choose, and who must be brought to a trial for their actions. The dispensation which answers best to such conditions as these is, that which at every moment supplies a sufficient, but not irresistible motive, to the living righteously in the world, which allows us at no time to think that we may sin without danger; and that is not, therefore, a dispensation by which the future is revealed. Such dispensation might, indeed, as we have said, effect that a greater number would be finally ready for death; but it would effect also that there would be more of practical atheism in the world, more of dissoluteness, more of unbridled licentiousness; and even the increased attentiveness to religion would have only the forced character of resulting altogether from a species of presumption, and would be in no sense worthy of rational and accountable creatures. You may think it strange that the householder is not told at what time the robber would come, seeing, that telling him, might prevent the breaking up of his house. If the future were laid open, so that every man might be informed of the exact hour when he should die, I can see the most disastrous results—increased misery, and increased wickedness; thousands unnerved for duty by the prospect of disaster, thousands more by the prospect of success; multitudes, by the certainty of life, determined to give the rein to every passion, if afterwards determined with the certainty of death to apply themselves to religion—determined only where there is not room for choice, and therefore, none for accountable creatures. This is a state of things, which, forasmuch as it would manifestly be worse than the present, was just as manifestly not to have been expected from a Being so wise and so benevolent as God. Admit then, that more would be saved were the day of death known; and, nevertheless, it does not follow that there is anything to surprise us in the day being concealed. It may still be shown that the dispensation of ignorance is far better adapted than would be a dispensation of knowledge, to the furthering all those ends which a righteous and moral governor would propose in his dealings with free and responsible beings. And, though it may surprise me to be told, that if God would tell men of the time of dissolution, there would be more likelihood of their being ready; and, yet that, notwithstanding he does not tell them; still when I think on what the world must be, were the future laid open, I can exclaim with Solomon, that "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing." I can be thankful that it does not please the Almighty to draw back the veil, and I can be sure that his hiding to-morrow is worthy of himself, and more profitable to me; though, all the while, I admit on the authority of Christ, that if "the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up."

Now, we have to say, that though we have engaged in this argument, it is practically of very little importance whether we can give satisfactory reasons why the future should be hidden, and for the declaration that the unveiling it would produce far greater preparedness for the termination of life. It might, on the whole, be advantageous, or, it might, on the whole, be disastrous, that the day of death should be known; but the arrangement to which we are to conform is one in which the day is absolutely unknown; and it must be our business rather to labour at acting agreeably to the circumstances in which we are placed, than to determine what effect would be wrought were those circumstances changed. The "goodman of the house" is not informed in what watch the thief will approach. No matter, then, whether or not the being informed would make him more vigilant in the securing a successful resistance. He cannot gain the information; and the only question, therefore, is, what can be done, now that, search how we will to-morrow eludes our inquiry? The answer to this is contained in the last verse of our text, in the exhortation which Christ founds on the statement in regard to the dispensation—"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

You observe, what an inference he draws from the fact, that the "goodman" being forewarned would certainly be upon his guard. If the man who knew the hour would make preparation, what, says our Lord, ought we to do, from whom the hour is hidden? In place of diminished watchfulness because the hour may be distant, there ought to be increased watchfulness, because the hour may be near. And observe, I beseech you, the emphatic "therefore" of our Lord. He goes from one case to another—from that of the householder to that of men generally, though the cases have nothing in common—the one being the case in which the hour is told; the other, the case in which the hour is concealed. And what power is there in the argument when there is this dissimilarity between the cases, except that in place of the concealment at all extenuating a want of readiness, it will make it the more inexcusable; forasmuch as that which a man ought to do when apprised of the time, he ought yet more to do when apprised only of the fact. This must be the import or force of the "therefore" of our text. The man who is warned should be in readiness; ought not then the man who is unwarned to be yet more earnest in fencing off the attack. Whatever motives there may be to vigilance in the knowledge of the hour, they must be, at least, as strong in ignorance of the hour. The man who knows that he shall be attacked knows when to put on his armour; but the man who knows not the hour when he shall be attacked knows only that he must never put off the armour. Suppose the householder quite certain that his house would be attacked, but quite ignorant when, is he excusable in not taking precautionary measures? Would it be held as any apology for being found unprepared that he knew nothing but the fact that he will be attacked? Would it not rather be said that he was all the more bound to have his defence in order, seeing that at no moment could he count himself secure? Men and brethren, this lesson is to you. The inference which Christ draws from the case of the householder is an inference as to the preparation which you ought to make for death; an inference which should have all the greater force on a day such as this, when the graves of another year give up their tenants to warn and admonish. It is admitted that in all likelihood if you were but apprised of the time at which you must die you would be found ready to depart out of life when that time arrived; but you are not, therefore, to imagine that it will be any excuse for you, if not found ready, that you were not informed of the hour of dissolution. Our Lord draws precisely the opposite inference. He makes the fact, that you would be prepared if you knew the day of death, a sort of argument against you if you neglect preparation now that the day is concealed. Is it not so? Since you would be prepared if you were but forewarned, it is evident that the being unprepared must be altogether your own fault; and that it must result from presumptuous confidence of your yet having a long time to live; and a fixed determination to adhere to the world and its pursuits, whilst there remains any likelihood of there being yet time for repentance. Why is it, Oh! man, that thou art not yet labouring to fortify thine house except that thou dost not know the hour when that house will be assailed? Suppose I come to thee as a prophet of death; and I come to thee with the message—Thou hast but three months to live! Ah, what terror, what anxiety, what solicitude, what inquiry, what preparation! But know that if found unprepared it will suffice to condemn thee that the prophecy has been thus energetic. He who would have been all activity knowing that he must die in three months, is his own wilful destroyer if he be all indolence, knowing that he may die in three weeks. Oh, why is it, young man, that the claims of religion can gain no audience with thee, unless because there is in thee an unacknowledged persuasion that the pleasures of sense may be enjoyed without danger, and that it were absurd while the strength is unbroken and the eye undimmed to give heed to things suited to the old and decrepid. But I come to thee, as a prophet, with a message from death; and I say to thee—In a few more weeks, and thou shalt be as one of us. Oh! where is now the midnight revel, the public show, the careless laugh, and the round of dissipation? All forsaken! all renounced! and thou art assiduous in studying the Scriptures, and frequent in prayer; inquiring after God, and sparing no pains that you may be ready for the assailant who is almost at the door. What then, if just because there be no such definite warning from the grave; but only the emphatic warning of thousands who have perished in their prime, that "the Son of man cometh in an hour that ye know not"—if on this account thou dost continue engrossed with the world, and art found at last with no defence against death; will it not suffice for your being inexcusable, that hadst thou but known the hour of assault, thou wouldst not have suffered thine house to be broken up? Ay, indeed, what men would do because of a certainty will be a swift witness against them, if they do less while exposed to an uncertainty. Our text, on first reading, may excite a feeling of regret, but not of discontent. One man might say—Oh, what a pity that the householder is not told in what watch the thief will come, seeing that out of a feeling of safety to himself, there would be little likelihood of his being found unprepared. But the householder cannot complain of not being told; he might have ground of complaint if he were told nothing; if he received no information as to the fact of the assault. But, assured that the thief will come; assured that nothing can prevent the thief coming, he has motive enough to the being on the watch, and the confessed fact that he would be found ready were he apprised of the time, will be evidence enough to justify vengeance if he be not found ready, though the time may be always at hand.

Thus, you see, I argue your inexcusableness from the uncertainty of life;

and I argue it all the more pointedly from arguing it on New Year's Day. I dare say there is not one of you who cannot call to mind some relation, some friend, some acquaintance who died in the year 1855; and I hope there is not one of you who can venture to think it—I would not say possible, but in the remotest degree probable—that all who have seen the dawn of 1856 will live to see its close. Some of us will be gone; some of us will be laid in the grave in the course of the year 1856. I argue then with you all from the uncertainty of life; and certainly, the argument ought to be all the more impressive, for it leaves you less excuse, than if I could argue with the certainty of death—a certainty, I mean, as to the time of death, as well as of the fact of death. I cannot tell you when you shall die; but on that very account does it behove you to give instant heed to the admonition—"Be ye also ready." If I could tell numbers who now know that they may die soon, that they would not die soon, no present argument could have a hold on all men; but forasmuch as I can gather all under one uncertainty, and represent the possibility of every individual with the dawn of to-morrow—yes, with the dawn of to-morrow—who will answer for a day? who will answer for an hour?—I can represent the possibility of every individual amongst you; the oldest amongst you, and the youngest amongst you, that with the dawn of to-morrow may the death knell announce that the spirit has passed away from the body. And on the supposition which, perhaps, many of you are wishing for; which, perhaps, all of you, on hearing the text, think you are justified in wishing for, the supposition that the householder should be distinctly informed as to the day and hour when the thief will come; that every man should be distinctly informed as to the day and hour when he must die—on such a supposition I say as this, I should have no hold whatever on the tens, and the hundreds, and the thousands. They would be sure of living for some time to come, and therefore they would give no heed to anything I could say. I might toll the knell; I might darken the scene with frequent funerals; but the multitude would tell me of a certainty that the solemn knell was not for them, that the gloomy procession was not moving towards their sepulchre; and, therefore, I thank God as a minister, that the householder does not know in what watch the thief will come. I stand amongst you as amongst those who are all sealed for death; andI bear on my own forehead the same imprinted sentence. I may cry with the church—He comes! He comes! Great God! is the day of probation at an end? Is all over? Is there no more time for repentance? Oh, stay yet awhile the dread solemnities of trial!—another month—another week—another day, that we may not go hence with all our sins upon our head, and therefore be consigned to everlasting torment! Ah, careless ones! such must be your burning thoughts; your passionate cries, if that day overtake you as a thief in the night! And we have no security against his thus coming; but one; the one security which is open to us all,—that of setting ourselves instantly to the seeking Christ, and crying for the pardon of sin through his most precious blood. This is the only course. "Be ye ready, for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh."

THE DUTY OF REJOICING.

Notes of a Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JANUARY 8, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."—Philippians iv. 4.

THERE are some precepts of Holy Writ which require things which we may, indeed, have difficulty in performing, but which, it is evident, we have, at least, the power of attempting. Of such are precepts which enjoin the forsaking of a bad habit, or the undertaking of a certain course of action. It may be very difficult to break away from what we know to be wrong, and to enter upon an opposite course, but no one will dispute that we may, if we will, make the endeavour, however hard we may find it, to make any progress; but there are other precepts which seem to enjoin what we have little if any power of attempting; of such are precepts which demand from us a particular power or aspect of mind, whatever may be our feelings. Take, for instance, the precept in our text; we are there enjoined with strong reiteration to rejoice and be glad—"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." You are all aware that we are frequently called upon in Scripture for sentiments and evidence of joyfulness; but it almost seems strange to some that it should be made a duty to be joyful and glad. Unless there be the cause of joy, it does not seem that we have the power of being glad; and, unless these joy-producing powers exist, we are unable to evince a joyfulness. At least we may reckon up, or keep in mind, our causes or occasions of sorrow or joy; and we may not allow ourselves to give way to either emotion without inquiring whether it be justified by our position; and if we should find our cause for sorrow to be less than our cause to be joyful, we might, at least, be ashamed of being unhappy, and this is a great preparation for a thankful state of mind. You know, that when a man is downcast in spirits, he is often raised by the conversation of a friend, who simply shows him that things are not so bad as he thinks, and that he is wrong in giving way when he might see much cause for gratitude, and much evidently for hope; and the same might always be done by a Christian if he would reckon up his reasons for sorrow and his reasons for joy, he might always prove that his reasons for joy far outweigh his reasons for sorrow. It can never be, that, possessing the prospects of religion, that the gloomy outdoes the bright. Then let us assume the temper and attitude of a man, who, by counting up his mercies, is seeking, as it were, to temper himself to thankfulness; and let us not be told of the strangeness of commanding you to be joyful, that being what you are sure to feel when you know that there is cause; such an emotion not falling under your control, but depending upon circumstances. Let us not be told of such things as these. Your Christian men always should be adjusting themselves to the breathings of God's Spirit. If they cannot call forth the melody which slumbers in the heart, they can awaken the breeze of its music; and they will never count it strange unless indeed as enjoining,what might not seem to need, reiterated command; they will not think it strange that inspired writers should reiterate—"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

But these remarks only bear upon the fact, that joyfulness is so far within our power, that our being joyful is so far within our command as our being honest, industrious, and sober. It is not, as though it were only a question of natural disposition or bodily condition whether the spirits shall be depressed. You are not to say that it is idle to call upon the man of melancholy temperament to rejoice, though there is clearly no debate that some persons are naturally of a joyful temperament. One great purpose of religion is, the furnishing us with motives and aids to correct our natural temperament and bringing moral forces into play, to counteract motives so opposite to good. Let the condition of the mind be what it may, the process is merely a recollection of our being always so circumstanced as to have more to gladden us than to depress us. If we would set one thing fairly against another, we might always, if not make ourselves joyful, yet so string the chords of the soul, as to utter praise; for surely you will not deny, that with a true Christian, the causes for gladness exceed the causes for grief—for instance, he has the promise of eternity if he act up to his charter as a child of God and a member of Christ. How beautifully doth the prophet speak of the subject. Hear the prophet Habakkuk—"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls." Thou hast left no source of sustenance, and what will I do—"Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." If the prophet had said, 'Yet will I trust in the Lord,' it would have been a great thing. The faith of most of us would have faltered and failed were the fig tree to fail and become dead, yet that was not enough for the prophet, for he said—"Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." He explains how joy will exist in spite of the adversities of sterility. My salvation is not affected by these distresses; for these distresses may only be for the perfecting of my salvation, and I will joy in God as the God of my salvation. So, then, let no Christian plead that he must hang his harp upon the willows, so unsuited it would seem, and so untuned to one of Sion's songs. Is he not entitled to discharge all his cares for God's providence? Is he not privileged to lay all his sins on God's Son? Is there not preserved for him, by God's infallible word, an eternal kingdom that cannot fail of joy? Has he a right then, has he an excuse for being disquieted? May we not then call upon him to be glad, in spite of a hundred causes of grief? for he may be sad if he had given up the Redeemer and renounced the faith; but while he holds unto his professions, we may say to him, as the performance of a duty—"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

Now, it is this matter of fact to which I am anxious to give prominence: the duty of being joyful. Some Christians are ready enough to speak of being joyful; they regard joy as one of the efforts of their spirits, and they are too apt to speak of their efforts as what they are permitted to attempt, instead of what they are directed to do. We wish you now to observe, with attention, that throughout Scripture, joyfulness is a commanded thing as much as a permitted thing, even as temperance is a commanded thing; but being a commanded thing, and not merely a permitted one, being joyful is as actually a duty—a duty to be attempted and laboured at by the Christian as the being temperate, or just, or faithful, or charitable.

We have already shown you that joyfulness is not dependent on the mere condition of animal spirits, but that which may wait on the animal spirits, just as we may on any of our animal propensities, by arraying reasons and motives. It is then actually, and, it is fitly, a commanded thing, this rejoicing in the Lord, and there is not one of you, who if he profess himself a Christian, with a Christian duty to perform, has any more right to withhold himself from the duty of labouring to be joyful, and from the duty of being joyful, than from the duty of labouring to be holy, and yet how little is this thought of. The man who would shrink with terror from the breaking of the commandment which enjoins purity, would often look with pleasure at the breaking of the commandment which enjoins joyfulness. But this is not a matter for human argument, seeing that it is made one of Divine command; there are as express reasons for gladness as for holiness, though many may think it more becoming to go heavily all their days, and that they may be lawfully sad in the face of a commandment to rejoice. They may not. No, no, God designed, and God constructed religion for a cheerful happy making thing, and as though he knew that if he made joyfulness only a privilege, numbers would have wanted it; but he made it a matter of precept that all must strive for it. We therefore ask you, whether ye may not find ground for conviction of having neglected this duty? Have you not been too contented with this state of compunction, contrition, and doubt, in the place of striving to advance into the state of the glorious liberty of the children of God with which it is hard to see how any believer can be sad, and has not this very much sprung from your own overlooking joyfulness, as a duty to be attempted as well as a privilege. You have often said to yourselves—"if I had a greater share of joyfulness"—but have you laboured for it? have you argued with yourselves as to the causes for gladness and remembered God's glorious promises? If you have not thus endeavoured to rejoice in the Lord, you are charged with having neglected a positive duty, and the continual spirit of gloom, which you find so depressing, may be mere evidence of punishment for disobedience of a command, for rejoicing is a duty not to be neglected. The believer is asked to state—"what is religion?" And it rests with him to show what it is. If he fails to rejoice, he brings disgrace upon religion. If he moves always dispirited and downcast, then he clearly acts in opposition to its precepts and contrary to a Divine command, by which you may understand an injury is done to religion, and by which numbers may be confirmed in the disbelief of religion; and that, too, by the failings of some professed believers. In one case, there is the apparent falsification of his profession by his acts; and, in another case, an apparent falsification by his speech, when affirming of wisdom that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," he stands convicted of falsehood, and there is a triumph for reason and infidelity. Neither is it only that he who has a wish to continue a despiser may strengthen himself in infidelity by the want of anything like gladness in a professed disciple of Christ, but it is that he who is the inquirer after religion will be deterred from his work when he sees how it defers the happiness for which he is in search, while many will see that those older than themselves in the Christian life are worse off than themselves in Christian comfort; and, without any wish to bear hardly upon those who have much to fear, we are bound to endeavour to arouse a duty of rejoicing in the Lord, and of never letting that duty be forgotten. The downcast religious man, who, while he feels his doubts, entertains ungrounded fear, instead of well grounded hope, as if confidence were not to be placed in God's word. It would be better, if he could be brought to observe that he is neglecting a positive duty; and, that while, through that neglect, he is not only confirming the unbelieving in their infidelity, but he is deterring the inquiring after Christ. Let this be diligently observed and remembered; for, we think we may answer for many now present, that often as they may have read such passages as the text, they have not read them as positive commandments in the same sense, in the same obligation as we have endeavoured to point out; they have gone on imagining that it does not please God to make them larger partakers of joy, whereas, all the while, they have been strengthening themselves in their gloom, and missed the springs of joy without digging for them, as if it were not with this water, as with other, that he who would have it bubble up must often cut through clay and rock. More than this, he has brought discredit on the gospel by presenting its appearance under a gloomy and forbidding aspect.

Once more, then, we beseech you to remember, that our text, and every similar passage in the Holy Scriptures, is a commandment, which having proceeded from God's mouth, may be kept by God's grace, and that our business is to set about to obey it. And Oh, remember this; that you who know little of spiritual peace, confidence, and gladness, to you it may sound strange; nevertheless, it is but the bitter consequence of neglected duty, and irreparable wrong done to the church and to the world by neglecting the text, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Still there may be a lingering suspicion that the rejoicing in the Lord, which is so distinctly commanded, may not always be possible; that like some other precepts, it rather marks out what we are bound to aim at than what we may hope to attain; and we may safely admit, that encompassed with infirmities, enclosed around with sin, Christians must alternate between gladness and gloom. If, still it is more than we can hope that we may never commit sin, it is more than we can hope that we shall ever be joyful, yet if his joy be ever interrupted, it ought only to be as the sun's brightness may be dimmed by a passing cloud, which quickly leaves the firmament as radiant as before. When betrayed into crime, then has he real cause for sorrow; and if he have no heart for sin, sin being that which he abhors, though he may have been betrayed into its commission, he may indeed grieve at having been thus betrayed into commission of that against which he has God's command, and "heaviness may endure for a night, but joy shall return in the morning." There are no causes for sorrow which have a right to prevent continual rejoicing. The apostle bids Christians to rejoice in the Lord, and this he bids then do always. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." Whatever the attribute specially contemplated, there is reason for rejoicing, there is motive for gladness. "But where is this," exclaims the desponding, "let me think of the Lord God as holy; can I, a sinner, rejoice in the presence of the Lord God who is holy?" If it be the goodness, the graciousness, or the mercy of the Lord which is commemorated, one might have readily understood the being called on to rejoice; but holiness, it is that as much, and more than any other quality of God which seems to raise a distance between him and the Christian, as if supposing he were less holy we might approach him with more faith. Some among you may be ready to exclaim—"I can look with amazement and awe at the holiness of God, until I am overwhelmed and lost in that holiness of God, and that it is a quality which raises such a barrier between me and God, that I could not dare to rejoice in the Lord always; to rejoice in him always, when I view him in his holiness, and when I view him in his mercy." Had not the work of Jesus Christ been the work which satisfied every attribute of the Lord, and procured the promise that God should welcome back the prodigal, and admit him to all the privileges of the son, it might be hard to believe that it was a work that gave cause to rejoice. It did not, as is often vaguely, but most erroneously thought—it did not shield us from wrath through love coming as a guardian and averting the vengeance which sin had provoked, though love was indeed the moving cause of our redemption. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son;" but what love prompted love arranged, and God in his love made joyfulness a command. Faithfulness unlocked the openings of heaven to every true penitent, and when that true penitent, yea, even the meanest and the poorest among you, when he accepts by faith the finished work of the Redeemer, if he does but fly to the love of God to screen him, he has justice on his side, for God pronounced his debt paid to the last; yea, there is no attribute of God on which he may not boldly look, and challenge it for him, and not against him. With the apostle he may say, that with God he is justified, and if it be God himself who justifies thus, every perfection must find itself provided for in the justifying process. But since every Divine attribute has this actually on the side of the believer in Jesus Christ, what attribute is that in which he may not rejoice? Only that God is too just to bestow a pardon without exacting a penalty. Who could have confidence in a gospel which offered the mourner forgiveness, and yet left the sinner unpunished? Shall he be silent when loftier intelligences, the burning spirits that surround God's throne are mingling their voices in that living anthem—"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." Yea, child of eternity, child even of sin, why shouldst thou be silent? Wouldst thou have God unholy? Would it be any cause of joyfulness that God should not be as he is? Surely then he would not be a God on whose promise thou couldst trust. Now, shall not his very holiness be a motive to praise, to rejoice in, and to rejoice in alway. There is, then, nothing in the attributes of God to prevent; nay, there is nothing but what should encourage rejoicing in the Lord. And is it not too self-evident a proposition to require being supported by argument, that if there be nothing in God in which we may not rejoice, there can be nothing in the universe with which we ought not to be glad. The Redeemer was a man who might say all things were his. We shall conclude in saying, that it is not asking too much for him to say, that his habitual mood may be one of gladness. Ye who may be said to cherish fears and doubts, as though they were safer than bright hope and implicit confidence, bear it to heart that, like the spies on their return from the promised land, you are bringing an evil report; by your gloom you are making others miserable for ever. Remembering the words of the text, you may, by God's help, cast off gloom, and walk more actually as children of light. Ponder with all diligence the expression—"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

Half the depression which there is among Christians arises from looking at themselves and into themselves. Even when looking at Christ for righteousness, they look at themselves for comfort. By their own feelings, their own evidences, they are comforted, if their faith seem to them too strong to let Christ go, whereas they should be comforted when they reflect that Christ is too faithful to let them go. It is Christ's hold on the believer that makes him safe. Rejoice then in the Lord. Try to find fresh cause to rejoice in the Lord. What you see in him, and not what you see in yourselves, will ever comfort you and make you more and more cheerful, and more and more rejoice in him; therefore—"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

Unavoidable circumstances render it just that this report should be published as Notes of a Sermon.

THE POWER OF THE BIBLE.

BY THE REV. H. MELVILL, B.D.

"The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple."—Psalm cxix. 130.

We think it right to impress on you most earnestly the wonderful fact, that, if all the books in the wide world were assembled together, the Bible would as much take the lead in disciplining the understanding, as in directing the soul. Living, as we do, in days when intellectual and scriptural are set down, practically, as opposite terms, and it seems admitted as an axiom that to civilize and to christianize, to make men intelligent and to make men religious, are things which have no necessary, nor even possible connection, it is well that we sometimes revert to the matter-of-fact; and whilst every stripling is boasting that a great enlargement of mind is coming on a nation, through the pouring into all its dwellings a tide of general information, it is right to uphold the forgotten position, that, in caring for man as an immortal being, God cared for him as an intellectual, and that, if the Bible were but read by our artizans and our peasantry, we should be surrounded by a far more enlightened, and intelligent, population than will appear on this land, when the school-master, with his countless magazines, shall have gone through it in its length and in its breadth.

The Bible, whilst the only book for the soul, is the best book for the intellect. The sublimity of the topics of which it treats; the dignified simplicity of its manner of handling them; the nobleness of the mysteries which it developes; the illumination which it throws on points the most interesting to creatures conscious of immortality; all these conspire to bring round a result which we insist upon as actual and necessary, namely, that the man who should study the Bible, and not be benefitted by it spiritually, would be benefitted by it intellectually. We think that it may be reckoned amongst incredible things, that converse should be held with the first parents of our race; that man should stand on this creation whilst its beauty was unsullied, and then mark the retinue of destruction careering with a dominant step over its surface; that he should be admitted into intercourse with patriarchs and prophets, and move through scenes peopled with the majesties of the Eternal, and behold the Godhead himself coming down into humanity, and working out, in the mysterious coalition, the discomfiture of the powers of darkness—oh, we reckon it, we say, amongst incredible things, that all this should be permitted to a man—as it is permitted to every student of Scripture—and yet that he should not come back from the ennobling associations with a mind a hundred-fold more expanded, and a hundred-fold more elevated, than if he had given his time to the exploits of Cæsar, or poured forth his attention on the results of machinery.

We speak not thus in any disparagement of the present unparalleled efforts to make knowledge accessible to all classes of our community. We are far enough from under-rating such efforts; and we hold, unreservedly, that a vast and a beneficial effect may be wrought amongst the poor through the well-applied agency of vigorous instruction. In the mind of many a peasant, whose every moment is bestowed on wringing from the soil a scanty subsistence, there slumber powers which, had they been evolved by early discipline, would have elevated their possessor to the first rank of philosophers; and many a mechanic, who goes patiently the round of unvaried toil, is unconsciously, the owner of faculties which, nursed and expanded by education, would have enabled him to electrify senates, and to win that pre-eminence which men award to the majesty of genius. There arise occasions when, peculiar circumstances aiding the development, the pent-up talent struggles loose from the trammels of pauperism; and the peasant and mechanic, through a sudden outbreak of mind, start forward to the places for which their intellect fits them. But, ordinarily, the powers remain through life bound up and torpid; and, he, therefore, forms but a contracted estimate of the amount of high mental endowment, who reckons by the proud marbles which cause the aisles of a cathedral to breathe the memory of departed greatness, and never thinks, when walking the village church-yard with its rude memorials of the fathers of the valley, that, possibly, there sleeps beneath his feet one who, if early taught, might have trod with a Newton's step the firmament, or swept with a Milton's hand the harpstrings. We make then every admission of the power which there is in cultivation to enlarge and unfold the human understanding. We nothing question that mental capacities are equally distributed amongst different classes of society; and that, if it were not for the adventitious circumstances of birth, entailing the advantages of education, there would be sent out from the lower grades the same proportion as from the higher, of individuals distinguished by all the energies of talent.

And thus believing that efforts to disseminate knowledge may cause a general calling forth of the mental powers of our population, we have no other feeling but that of pleasure in the survey of these efforts. It is indeed possible—and of this we have our fears—that, by sending a throng of publications to the fireside of the cottager, you may draw him from the Bible, which has heretofore been specially the poor man's book, and thus inflict upon him, as we think, an intellectual injury, full as well as a moral. But, in the argument now in hand, we only uphold the superiority of scriptural knowledge, as compared with any other, when the alone object proposed is that of developing and improving the thinking powers of mankind. And we reckon that a fine triumph might be won for Christianity, by the taking two illiterate individuals, and subjecting them to two different processes of mental discipline. Let the one be made familiar with what is styled general information; let the other be confined to what we call Bible information. And when, in each case, the process has gone on a fair portion of time, and you come to inquire whose reasoning faculties have been most improved, whose mind has most grown and expanded itself, we are persuaded that the scriptural study will vastly carry it over the miscellaneous, and that the experiment will satisfactorily demonstrate, that no knowledge tells so much on the intellects of mankind as that which is furnished by the records of inspiration.

THE MINISTER AND THE MISSIONARY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JANUARY 15, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."—Matthew xi. 23.

THE peculiarity in this passage on which we wish to fasten is just this. If an apostle had been sent to a strange city, to Sodom, he would have been successful in his preaching; kept at home, ministering in Capernaum, he would be almost unsuccessful. It is in accordance with this peculiarity, it is an exhibition of the same fact, when God says to his prophet Ezekiel—"Thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee." Now, let us consider a little the peculiarity in question. The man who devotes himself to preaching the gospel to the heathen is very justly considered as entering on a work of great toil and self-denial; the disinterestedness of a zealous missionary is acknowledged and applauded on all hands, so that even those who have no fellowship with him in principle, admire him for the manifestation of what they account heroism of character. It must be frankly admitted, that the being sent to a people of a strange speech and a hard language involves difficulties and sacrifices which they who labour among their own countrymen are not required to meet and to make. If you contrast the condition of the parish priest in our own land with that of the missionary who has settled himself in the midst of a Pagan and uncivilized tribe—the condition, that is, of a preacher who labours at home in Capernaum with that of him who goes abroad to Sodom—you see at once that the advantage is so vastly on the side of the home labourer, that you regard the foreign as comparatively a martyr; but, after all, it is a very superficial view from which we conclude that there is no proportion between the trials of the parish priest and the trials of the missionary. At first sight it would certainly appear, that he who is appointed to minister in an English village has a task which will not bear the being compared with that of the teacher who is despatched to a Hottentot settlement; and yet, when we come to analyze the reasons on which we ground the conclusion, we shall find them made up of much which is not strictly ministerial. The banishment from his own country, the residence in an unhealthy climate, the being associated with the rude and the inhospitable, the being continually exposed to insult and injury—these are among the first circumstances which occur to the mind, when determining the arduousness of the missionary work; and when we think that the home labourer, on the contrary, is settled down amongst kinsmen and friends, occupying perhaps, on the very account of his office, a station of comfort and influence, we do not hesitate to set the hardship of the one condition against the ease of the other condition—Sodom against Capernaum—just because, although different in kind, the trials of the home scene must be necessarily far inferior to those of the foreign. But now we should like you carefully to remark, that we do not judge by the same rule in respect to others besides missionaries. We are not aware that the merchantman who, in order to prosecute his commerce, settles himself on some wild shore, and excludes himself from all the companionship of civilized life, draws after him the sympathies of the community, or that his condition is regarded as melancholy and pitiable, when contrasted with that of another, who plies his business in one of our own cities or our own ports. If the merchantman thrive in his occupation, all else is overlooked or forgotten. Provided he grow rich, and thus attain the end proposed by his labours, we never think of admiring his heroism; we never think of commiserating his hardships, because Labrador, and not London, Sodom, and not Capernaum, has been the scene of his residence. But we have no more right to judge the circumstances of the minister than of the merchant, by a simple reference to climate, and country, and physical privations. If the merchant be successful as a merchant, you make little or no account of his voyages, and his perils, and his sufferings; let the wealth be acquired, and the place and the toil of acquisition will scarcely enter into your reckoning, when comparing him with some competitor in trade. But the minister's wealth, if he be truly a devoted servant of God, is the success which attends his preaching the gospel. His aim is or should be, to win souls to Christ; and his present recompense is in the being surrounded with converts to the faith; and if the foreign field of labour be more productive than the home, so that the gospel finds a heartier reception amongst the savages than amongst his own countrymen—in Sodom than in Capernaum—it is evident that the spiritual merchantman, for thus may the minister be called, will reap most wealth where he endures most privation, and that, consequently, if the money which the trader makes causes to overlook his toil and his exile, the converts which the missionary makes should throw into the shade his many and his formidable endurances. If you consider ministers as labourers for God, you will quickly perceive, that he whose scene of occupation is the English parish, has not necessarily any advantage over him who is appointed to the Hottentot settlement. The great question is that of the likelihood of ministerial success; just as in the case of the two merchants, the one in London, the other in Labrador, the great question is that of the likelihood of commercial prosperity. We do not underrate the physical sufferings either of the missionary or of the merchant; but if the merchant abroad grow richer than the merchant at home, his superior wealth is regarded as a full counterpoise to his superior toil. In like manner, if the minister in the Hottentot settlement win more souls than the minister in the English parish, his greater success must, on any moral computation, be considered as balancing his greater privations. And hence, with all our admiration of that moral chivalry which leads a man to abandon his home, and to give himself to the battle with heathenism, we are far enough from allowing, that he necessarily demands more of our sympathy than another, who is devoting his strength to the work of the ministry in the land of his birth. We suppose both to be equally earnest in proclaiming the gospel—equally to count it their meat and their drink to make Christ known to their perishing fellowmen; and when once it is allowed that the master-principle is the same, and of the same energy in both, we cannot compare the trials of these men by merely comparing the glaciers or the sand-plains, where the one has his habitation, with the sunny and luxuriant landscape which may gird round the other, nor by setting the dangers and discomforts of the savage state in contrast with the tranquillities and enjoyments of civilized life. The degree in which the master principle finds scope or satisfaction is the alone, at least the main respect, in which comparison may be instituted; and if the foreign desert be a more favourable soil than the home garden for the seeds of vital Christianity, we shall not hesitate to declare, that the English parish priest deserves more sympathy, because toiling with less present recompense, than the missionary who is planted in Africa or Greenland; ay, and that there may be this difference in point of success between the home field of labour and the foreign, is but too plainly indicated by our Lord in the text; for he tells us, that had the mighty works which had been done in Capernaum been done in Sodom, that lost city would have remained until this day.

Now, we make these remarks, because that which at least ought to be the chief article in a clergyman's anxiety and trials is easily lost sight of in a selfish and a mercenary age. There is something which appears to us suspicious in those compliments which the world is so ready to bestow on the zeal and the disinterestedness of a missionary. It is not that the missionary is not worthy of the admiration; but this admiration is all elicited by his resolve to go and labour in a distant country, when he might remain and labour at home. The amount of temporal inconvenience to which he exposes himself, or the amount of temporal comfort which he surrenders, this just measures the amount of commendation which he obtains from the world; and we cannot help supposing from this, that ministerial trial is ordinarily measured by nothing but physical privation; so that whilst the sphere of labour is at home, and he is not called to undergo actual hardship, the spiritual pastor is considered as having little to endure, and still less to resign. The foreign labourer is extolled at the expense of the home; though this were little, if it did not mark an ignorance which is ignorance also of the elements of Christianity—an ignorance of the fact, that ministerial trials, strictly so called, may be greater, and ministerial recompense less, amongst a nominally evangelized than amongst a heathen population—at Capernaum than at Sodom. It is quite true, that he who engages in carrying the gospel to the heathen must give up much and endure much; but his master desire is that of gaining over the perishing to the religion of Christ; and we are sure, therefore, that if he be placed where this master desire has ample gratification, there is more than a counterpoise to all his toil and all his self-denial. And therefore are we further assured, that the earnest and unobtrusive labourer in many of our own parishes, with whom the world has no sympathy, in whom it sees nothing to admire, oh! he may have a far greater share of that trial which is peculiar to a minister, and which, therefore, is the main thing to be considered in a comparison of sufferings, than the missionary who, drawing after him the applauses of a nation, throws himself into the waste of idolatry and barbarism. There is many a district in this country, which offers more resistance to spiritual cultivation than the wilds of absolute Paganism; and he whose lot is cast in one of such districts, and who wrestles to all appearance fruitlessly, year after year, with the obduracy and indifference of a profligate peasantry, oh! he would make an exchange incalculably in his favour, if transferred, for example, to a Moravian village in some far distant land, where Christianity is rapidly humanizing the savage, and the truths of the Bible, preached in simplicity and faithfulness, are overthrowing the superstitions and extirpating the vices of a long-degraded tribe.

But now pass on to other trains of thought—trains which may just as naturally be evolved from our text. In contemplating the fact, that in many cases a preacher will be more successful abroad than at home, for this is what our text states—in Sodom than in Capernaum—not a few questions suggest themselves, which it is important, as well as difficult to answer. Why, for instance, should the foreign field be more promising than the home? If Sodom would have repented, though Capernaum remains indifferent, why is the gospel not sent to the former city, rather than to the latter? It must readily be admitted, that these are points which the passage under review brings fairly before us. Had the mighty works done in Capernaum been wrought in

Sodom, they would have been effectual to the producing repentance. Such is the fact stated, and that too by our Redeemer himself. But when the fact is admitted, we naturally inquire, why the heathen was more likely to listen than the Jew; and then why the message was not delivered where there would be the greatest likelihood of its meeting with success.

I. The first thing, then, for consideration is, that the foreign field, Sodom, may be more productive than the home field, Capernaum; in other words, so as to make the case completely our own, that ministerial success in an English parish may be far less than ministerial success in a missionary settlement. There seems, indeed, everything on the side of a clergyman who labours amongst those who have been baptized into a profession of Christianity, and everything against another, who addresses himself to pagans who know nothing of God. Christianity has so interwoven itself into all the framework of our society, that much of the rough work seems done for the minister, and he may at least take up the basis of moral instruction at a more advanced point than he who has to deal with the worshipper of idols. If I were now addressing you for the first time, I should not think it needful to begin with labouring out a proof of the existence of God, or of the falsehood of the notion of there being many gods. Nay, I may venture to suppose, that there is hardly one of you, the youngest or the poorest, who is altogether unacquainted with the scheme of redemption, who has never yet been told of the love of that Saviour who "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;" and thus, if this were my introduction to you as your minister, I seem to find a great deal of preliminary work already effected, and I am at liberty to commence my ministrations with the full exhibition of some rich and scriptural truth; whereas, to take another supposition, if I had just landed on some distant shore, and there were gathered around me an assembly of savages, and I was desired to address them as a part of an enslaved, though redeemed population, should I not be hampered by a consideration of the gross darkness in which this people had lived, and find it difficult to begin at a sufficiently low point with an audience removed but few degrees from the brute? And if on a hasty calculation you set my circumstances, as commencing a ministration amongst yourselves, against those which would surround me, if engaged in a mission to the heathen, you would probably conclude that the likelihood of my success—success, we mean, in winning souls—would be vastly greater at Capernaum than at Sodom—in the English parish than in the African settlement—we must press upon your notice, that the likelihood of our giving ear to the gospel message diminishes in proportion to the frequency of its repetition. We have no language in which to tell you our idea of the moral hardness which is generated by the continued but neglected proclamation of the gospel. There is not upon earth so unfavourable an audience—an audience, that is, out of which there is so little probability that converts will be fetched to vital Christianity, as that which is made up of individuals well versed in the theory, and only in the theory of religion. The preaching of the gospel is never a neutral thing; it must either benefit or injure. It is with spiritual as with natural things. You may live within sound of the roar of cannon, till you become insensible to the sound, and even sleep without being disturbed. And thus you may grow habituated to the thunders of the Word, and hear them so often as not even to be startled by their roll. And shall it yet be said, on any principles of calculation, of that man of you who has stood out for many years in his formality and indifference, hearing the gospel till practically it has deafened him to its calls, that he is a more promising subject for ministerial attack than the rude dweller in the desert, who has never yet been told of his immortality, and never been offered salvation through a Mediator? Have I as much of scriptural warrant for hoping, that men who have been baptized with a Christian baptism, and educated in Christian principles, and plied with a Christian ministry, and nevertheless are utter strangers to the power of Christianity, will be brought over by another sermon, or will yield to another exhortation, as that men who have been heretofore debarred from every moral advantage, unto whom there has been no throwing open of the sublime things of the future, will hearken gladly to the message delivered in its first freshness, and bearing to them the tidings of love and forgiveness? In the one case I am opposed by barbarism, and ignorance, and superstition, and these are formidable adversaries; in the other, I am opposed by enlightened heads and untouched hearts,—this is the combination which of all others threatens effective resistance. When, therefore, you contrast the English parish with the missionary settlement, Capernaum with Sodom, you must compare the probable march of the gospel where it has been long struggling for mastery, and where it has never yet gained footing. There is something in the condition of a country which has for many centuries been nominally evangelised, which deserves to be seriously thought on by its every inhabitant. It is with Christianity as with all other blessings: when long possessed it becomes less considered. Whilst there is a struggle for a blessing, and there seems any probability of its being torn from our grasp, we are alive to its worth, and firm in its maintenance; but let the danger pass, and that for which we would have fought bravely whilst in jeopardy, we grow indifferent to when secure. The gospel has come down to us, an heir-loom from our ancestors, and in our every village there is provision for its being published. It is not in the face of persecution, and it is not in the surrender of worldly advantage, that we are to make profession of the pure religion of Jesus; every man may "sit under his own vine and his own fig-tree, none making him afraid," whilst he worships the one Mediator, and approaches the Father through Christ as his way of access. But we dare not say, that the time of outward peace is necessarily the best for the growth of vital Christianity; we dare not say, that in proportion as Christianity becomes interwoven with the institutions of a country, we may look to see it engraven into the hearts of the people. We know too well of a mighty risk, that just because the blessing is within reach of all it may be neglected by the great mass of a community, and that whilst the external reception of a religion is almost the thing of course, a practical indifference to that religion may be overspreading every class of society. Therefore is it that we fear for a country which has long been favoured with the unclouded light of the gospel, and that we make its privileges the measure of our anxieties. The tendency of Christianity, as we have said, is to harden, where it does not soften and overcome. This renders our home parishes, our Capernaums, so doubtful, if not unpromising, as fields of ministration. A clergyman is set over one of those parishes, and he enters with zeal and with earnestness on its moral cultivation; but possibly the gospel has long been faithfully published in this parish; its families have been acted on by the very instrumentality which the new pastor is to wield, and though there may have been here and there a solitary conversion, so that Christ has not left himself without witness in the neighbourhood, the dissoluteness of the population is virtually unchecked, and but too probably their last minister went down to his grave, worn in strength and wearied in spirit, mourning the unfruitfulness of his self-denying labours. Hence the new clergyman has a soil to till, which the former tillage has only seemed to render increasingly barren; his business is that of striving to subdue, by means which have heretofore served to strengthen in rebellion; and who will deny that, entering on this hardened territory, the engines with which he must toil at the ploughing it up being those under whose workings the earth has already approximated to the stone, the labourer has even a less prospect of ministerial success than if sent as a missionary to some tribe of the heathen? So that, whatever in a certain respect the advantages of a home scene of ministration, they are counterpoised in the increased resistance to spiritual impression which is the produce of a disregarded gospel. All the blandness and all the beauty of the English landscape disappear, all the ruggedness and all the dreariness of the African scene melt away; for if the mighty works done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, it would long ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and in ashes.

II. But you cannot, we think, have followed us through our foregoing observations, without finding that another question suggests itself, which we proposed, in the second place, briefly to consider. If the foreign field of labour would be more productive than the home—if Sodom would hearken, though Capernaum was impenitent—why, you will ask, why is not the gospel sent thither? Why must it be preached where it is certain to be preached comparatively in vain?

Now, we have but little to give in reply to such questions. It is better to confess ignorance than to hazard conjectures, where revelation has not been explicit. That many nations should be left through many centuries in all the darkness of heathenism, that millions for whom Christ died should pass out of the world unavoidably ignorant of the alone propitiation for sin—we allow at once that there is a mystery in this appointment which, with our present amount of information, is wholly impenetrable. We have evidently no sufficient means of determining why God should send the gospel to one nation, and withhold it from another nation: we can only resolve it into the sovereign will of the Almighty, and say, in the words of the Saviour, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." But let us take heed not to heighten the mystery by adding suppositions not warranted by Scripture. After all, we know very little as to God's future dealings with the heathen. The heathen are redeemed men, as much purchased by the blood of Christ as those blessed with all the privileges of the gospel. In what degree the energies of the atonement may extend themselves to the stranger and the foreigner, and procure acceptance for those who act up to the light of the dispensation beneath which they live, this, indeed, we pretend not to determine; but neither will we venture to say, that those who are excluded from all knowledge must necessarily be excluded from all benefit. It may be that the special honour of composing the mystical body of Christ, that church which is emphatically described as the bride of the Lamb, may belong exclusively to those who have been outwardly admitted into the privileges of Christianity, and inwardly united to the Mediator; but we cannot close our eyes to incidental notices in the pages of Scripture, which seem to indicate that others besides the Lamb's bride shall have share in the happiness of the future. In the 45th Psalm you read not only of "the king's daughter, all glorious within," and whose "clothing is of wrought gold," but also of "the virgins, her companions," who are brought with her to the king. The king's daughter is the church, made one by faith with the Saviour. Who are the companions that thus bear her company? The same distinction is occasionally to be seen in the Book of Canticles; and though it might be rash to build any theory on such scattered intimations, yet so long as Scripture has not said that immortality is within reach of none but those who live beneath the Christian dispensation, who has a right to hold that every heathen must unavoidably be lost? The heathen, we may believe, will be judged by the laws of the dispensation beneath which they live; the standard of trial will bear an accurate proportion to the standard of privilege; and therefore, though it be impossible that those high things be reached whose attainment is ascribed to faith in a Mediator, we can well believe that those fearful things may be avoided which shall hereafter be ascribed to the despisers of Christ. The verse succeeding our text informs us, that it will be more tolerable at the judgment for Sodom than for Capernaum; so that where the opportunities are small, so probably is the responsibleness; and we the less marvel that God should have given only little, seeing that only little will be demanded in return. "The Judge of all the earth" shall "do right;" and his dealings with tribes and individuals of our race, as cleared up hereafter, at the final settlement of the affairs of this creation, shall irresistibly prove him no respecter of persons. If beyond our comprehension, it is not beyond our faith, that those who seem morally abandoned of God shall stand forth at the last, as equitably dealt with as those who are encircled by every moral advantage, and that no man, when judged, as every one shall be, by his improvement of means, will have cause to arraign the dispensation beneath which he was left whilst on earth. The "people of a strange speech" would hearken; and yet the prophet is not sent to address them. We cannot deny this; for the statement is that of the Almighty himself. Are not, then, the people of a strange speech injuriously treated, a blessing being withheld which they would confessedly have improved? But we reply, that unless informed of the exact nature of future dealings with the heathen, we only speculate rashly, and perhaps sinfully, when we thus impugn the injuriousness of an appointment of God. The men who would have hearkened are perhaps improving to the utmost means already in possession; they are not, then, men of whom we might say, they must perish, unless some prophet preach to them the message of revelation; improving the light already possessed, they will not, for any thing we can tell, be outcasts at the judgment; and however, it may seem to us, that they are disadvantaged by their moral position, surely, since we cannot prove them left of God to unavoidable ruin, it is no great demand on our faith that we believe it possible, that hereafter their condition, as compared with that of others, will be shown to have furnished no just ground of complaint.

Such are a few remarks that we would advance on a point, confessedly the most difficult, suggested by our text. That God appointed Ezekiel to continue preaching to the Jews though the Jews would not hearken; that Christ worked miracles in Capernaum, though Capernaum would not receive them; in this there may have been nothing but what was needed to the leaving man without excuse, whilst he filled up the measure of his iniquities. That Ezekiel should not have been sent to strangers who would have hearkened, that the miracles should not have been wrought in Sodom, though the city might have repented in sackcloth and ashes—I cannot pronounce that either unjust or unmerciful; for I cannot prove that any have perished who, if better taught, would have been saved. Indeed, I confess ignorance. I know that, having heard of Christ, I myself—every one of you—must unavoidably perish, unless we believe in Christ. I have been brought—every one of you has been brought—under the gospel dispensation; by the laws and the rules of that dispensation must I be judged at the last; and these laws and these rules condemn me to everlasting death, if not justified by faith in the Lord our Redeemer. Such is the case with myself; such is the case with all of you, every one who has been admitted into the Christian church, or to whom there have come the glad tidings of redemption; but I know not, for I am not told, how God will deal with those to whom Christ was never preached, whose mountains were never trodden by the feet of the messengers of peace; and I know not, for I am not told, how those of whom God foreknew that they would have hearkened, had they been called, may have been wrought on by that Spirit who can use other voices beside those of preachers, and other churches besides those made with hands. Let it be enough for us, that there are in Scripture such statements as these: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." Enough for us to know, that if Sodom have the fewer advantages, Capernaum will have the heavier condemnation. "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." Let us only guard you against an error, which is often the issue of such trains of thought as we have just been pursuing. Unless men can feel sure that all the heathen are to perish, they will not take part in any missionary enterprise. "We had better," they will say, "leave the heathen in their ignorance. If we introduce the gospel, we shall probably only injure their condition, by increasing their responsibilities." But where there is a positive command, obedience must be independent on possible consequences. God has bidden us "preach the gospel to every creature." Then our duty is clear. We leave results to our Maker. I support missions, not because certain that all who die in heathenism go down to the bottomless pit, but because commanded to take measures for overspreading the world with Christianity. If certain that they would all be saved, it makes no difference; the command is too explicit to be evaded; and I would freight the ship with Bibles and preachers, and send her forth on the missionary voyage, if certain that they will perish. Their forlorn and fearful state may act on my feelings, and make me more energetic; but my first motive should be, that God had bidden me attempt their conversion, and the discharge of duty; ought not to presuppose the excitement of sensibility. If you carry no other lesson away with you, we trust you will carry this, that religion finds motive enough in the fact that a thing is commanded. It does not require to be assured that the thing will be successful. Ye will be earnest, then, if ye be Christian men, to send to the heathen lands the message of Christianity. A sense of your own privileges will move you to energy. O the load, the ponderous load of accountableness, which the possession of privileges lays on individuals! Better, far better, to have been born in a Pagan land, the worshippers of the unknown spirit of the mountain or the flood, than to have seen the light in a Christian territory, and neglected the God who has spoken to us by his Son! Do not so live as to turn your advantages into witnesses against you at the judgment! You cannot be willing to be crushed by your mercies! Therefore, in God's strength, let us all resolve to labour at turning our privileges to account, lest the waters of baptism, and a mother's prayer, and a father's counsel, and the sacramental elements, and a free Bible, and the exhortations of good men, and the remonstrances of faithful preachers, bear a condemning testimony at the last. Alas! it is but too possible—God avert it from us all!—that opportunities which, if improved, would have made full blessedness our own, should help, because despised, to build the prison and to fan the flame!

REPENTANCE AND FAITH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JANUARY 22, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."—Mark i. 14, 15.

It is upon the concluding part of these verses that I wish specially to discourse, on the sum and substance of our blessed Lord's preaching: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." Repentance and faith are the summary of his public exhortations; just as afterwards with the Apostle Paul, who describes himself, you remember as testifying "both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." There is not, as you see, one message for one set of men and another for another set of men; Jew and Greek were sinful alike, and required the same moral treatment. And thus, also, in our dealings with different characters and classes, we do not feel it necessary to deny all distinctions between them, as though we confounded vice and virtue, right and wrong, and gave no preference to the decent and well ordered over the profligate and the lawless; but we cannot admit that any man's moral excellence can exempt him from the necessity of repenting, or that the most strenuous can so obey for himself as not to need the trusting in the obedience of another; and hence, therefore, we have but one message. All alive as we may be to the fact, that as members of society, some of you are far more exemplary than others, we are sure of you as creatures of God that you all lie under condemnation, and accordingly we say to all who would be saved from wrath, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." God, as you will have observed in the words of St. Paul, is the immediate object of repentance—"repentance towards God;" whilst Christ Jesus, of whom the gospel is but the embodiment, is the immediate object of faith, "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." There is no difficulty in understanding this definition, for sin is emphatically that which we commit against God, the wrongness of actions when viewed relatively to our Creator; and, therefore, repentance, which is genuine sorrow for sin, must be directed towards God, or have God for its object. It is not that we might not also sin against Christ, for view Christ in his divine capacity, and our actions take the same character relatively to the Son as relatively to the Father; but it is in his Mediatorial capacity that Christ is especially presented to us in the gospel; and the Son, when viewed as Mediator, is the object of faith, as distinguished from the

Father, who is the object of repentance. We are considered in the light of rebels against God; and before he will forgive us, God requires from us genuine repentance. But repentance of itself is not sufficient: it makes no satisfaction to the law which we have broken, and therefore, over and above repentance, God requires faith in his Son whom he hath set forth as a propitiation for sin. Where repentance and faith co-exist there—according to the whole testimony of Scripture—sin is forgiven and immortality is bestowed.

Now, after this general review of the substance of our Lord's teaching, as announced in our text, there are three points to which we would particularly direct your attention. The first, is the insufficiency of repentance by itself to procure the forgiveness of sin; the second is the suitableness of faith to the being associated with repentance as a condition; and, the third is, the thorough harmony of both conditions with the great and blessed fact, that eternal life is a free gift through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Now we are to begin with the insufficiency of repentance; an insufficiency which is certainly taught by the words of our text: for by requiring men to believe the gospel, as well as to repent, Christ virtually asserts that the latter, repentance, would be of no avail, unless combined with the former, which is faith. And here we have to oppose the whole host of deistical writers, too often seconded by those who are professedly orthodox, or who receive the Bible as a revelation from God. It is a very favourite notion with all who dislike the doctrine of the atonement, the doctrine, that is, that Christ died as a sacrifice for sin; it is, we say, a very favourite notion with all such that pardon must follow necessarily upon repentance, so that there can be no need for such a propitiation as we profess to find in Christ Jesus. They argue that from the relation which subsists between the Creator and the creature, there can be nothing needed, but that man, if he have offended, should repent; and, that on his repentance, he is necessarily forgiven. There never was a theory which could draw less support, whether from experience, or from reason. Let us suppose a man penetrated with the sense of God's infinite goodness and love, creation, or conscience, or tradition, or all these combined, being his witness to the mercy of the Most High; we will suppose him also persuaded of his having sinned against God, and his therefore needing pardon in order to happiness; and then, let us further suppose him concluding from the character of God, and the nature of sin, that if he be indeed contrite for past offences, and amend his life for the future, he shall, undoubtedly be forgiven and restored to divine favour. Now, this conclusion we declare to be utterly unjustifiable. We challenge the man by whom it is alleged to vindicate its truth by even plausible arguments. For, is it so amongst ourselves? Does pardon follow at all necessarily on repentance? Who ever dreams when laws have been broken of the criminal being forgiven just because he is contrite? He may be bitterly sorry for what he has done; if exempted from punishment he might never repeat the offence; but all this avails nothing to the satisfying justice, to the making amends to the violated majesty of the law: and the man is condemned, though with no suspicion that his repentance is insincere; and, moreover, without any imputation on the judge of hardheartedness or want of compassion. What right can we have to suppose, that what would be utterly ineffectual, had we broken the laws of man, must necessarily be efficacious when set against the breaking of the laws of the Almighty? Besides, what is the testimony of experience so far as there is a present administration of punishment? Are contrition and amendment found to have the virtue so confidently alleged? Nay, who knows not that they are utterly without avail in turning away penalties which follow in the way of natural consequences upon actions? The intemperate man may be deeply sorry for his intemperance, and may thoroughly abandon it; but he is not on these accounts delivered from the effects of his intemperance; he may carry them to the grave, notwithstanding his repentance, in a shattered constitution and injured reputation. It is the same in various other cases. In fact, in every instance where men suffer through their own rashness, vice, or misconduct, the suffering is not to be got rid of through sorrow, however pungent, nor through amendment, however complete. And we may well ask, with what show of truth is repentance to be pronounced sufficient to avert future punishment, when thus manifestly inadequate to deliver us from present punishment?

Or again. Does reason any more than experience determine that there is any necessary connection between repentance and forgiveness? Present obedience can evidently make no amends for past disobedience. It may prevent my incurring further punishment, but it can do nothing more. It cannot rescue me from that already incurred. There is the very widest difference between a state of innocence and a state of penitence, though many seem almost to confound the two, as though the repenting of a sin were much the same thing as the not having sinned. My actions as a penitent may be thoroughly pleasing to God, but they cannot have a retrospective effect: they leave my actions as a sinner in all their iniquity and in all their hatefulness, so that the record against me remains what it was. There would have been none had I been always innocent; but there does not cease to be any because I am penitent.

Turn then to analogy, turn to experience, turn to reason, and you may equally prove the fallacy of the opinion which would establish a necessary connection between repentance and forgiveness. It would lead men to suppose that, provided there be sorrow and the forsaking of sin, there would be need of nothing else to obtain them the pardon and restore them to the favour of God. It is not the opinion to which men have come who have been left to form a creed from reason and tradition. Witness the prevalence of sacrifices; yea, of human sacrifices, which have undoubtedly proved a persuasion that there was anger on the part of God towards man—that anger was the tyrant to be deprecated—and that sorrow of itself, however sincere, would never avail to the procuring the forgiveness of sin. Witness even the working of conscience amongst yourselves. You know very well if you forsake an evil course, or renounce an evil habit, and if conscience deliver—as it assuredly will—a reproving testimony, you do not on that account get rid of a sense of uneasiness derived from your having once followed that course, or been a slave of that habit. There is a mixture of feeling, satisfaction at now doing right, and dissatisfaction at having before done wrong; and this is a witness whose evidence it is hardly possible to mistake, that a state of penitence is never the same as a state of innocence; in other words, that offending and then repenting must in no sense be thought tantamount to the not offending at all. Whether, then, it proceed from the open Deist, who wishes for a scheme of theology freed from the peculiarities of the Christian, or from those who entertain vague notions of divine mercy, and suppose that sorrow can make amends for sin, we denounce as the most unsupported of theories that which urges, that if a man sincerely repent, he may confidently expect pardon. We know very well the opinion is far from uncommon, for every minister who works much with the sick, has frequent and painful proofs that men hope to be forgiven, simply because they are what they call "penitent," though all the while they are virtually unmindful or ignorant of what God hath done to make pardon consistent with his attributes. And we wish to urge upon all of you the utter inefficiency of repentance, so far as we can gather from reason and experience, for the procuring of itself the forgiveness of sin, that you may remain shut up to the great scheme of mercy which is laid open to you by the gospel of Christ. For so long as there is any notion of the virtue of repentance, its virtue as a necessary procuring of pardon and acceptance, there must be a suspicion that the atonement is not called for, and therefore a question as to whether indeed it have ever been made. The notion which we combat is essentially deistical, though often found with those who do not suppose themselves Deists. Once establish any thing like a necessary connection between the being penitent and the being pardoned, and you establish the unnecessariness of a sacrifice for sin: and, this done, you had better, for consistency, reject the Bible altogether, or receive it first and explain it away afterwards. But when you have been led to the seeing that whatever God may be pleased to do, there is nothing in the nature of repentance to make it binding upon him to grant forgiveness of sin, you are prepared for the enactment of some further condition: you will not think it surprising if an inspired teacher, or the Redeemer himself testify of more than repentance; you will rather expect some such addition as is found in our text, when our Saviour not only calls upon men to repent, but calls upon them to "repent," and to "believe the gospel."

II. Now, we have hitherto strictly confined ourselves to considering the inefficiency of repentance by itself to procure pardon, or rather, to the showing that there are no grounds whatsoever for the supposing it sufficient. We thus prepare you for the finding some further condition annexed to the forgiveness of sin, though as to what that condition might be, we should be wholly in the dark if it were not for the revelation of the gospel. According to our text, this further condition is faith in the gospel which our Lord came to publish. And we propose to examine in the second place, the suitableness of faith to the being thus associated with repentance. You will remember, that in arguing the insufficiency of repentance, or disproving its alleged necessary sufficiency, we reasoned from the difference between a state of innocence and a state of penitence; from the incapacity of present obedience to make any amends for past disobedience. And all such reasoning supposes that there is a principle of justice in the Divine Being which may demand the exaction of penalties already incurred, and which may not be satisfied by our simple endeavour not to incur more. We cannot conclude repentance sufficient to procure forgiveness, because repentance, though it may prevent our deserving fresh punishment, cannot make us not to have deserved punishment at all. It may cause that no new record be entered against us; it cannot, from its very nature cause that the old record be erased. Here is its deficiency; which is felt, as we have affirmed, by even natural religion, though it be far beyond its power to determine its supply. What is to be done in regard to punishment already deserved, even supposing that through thorough amendment of life we might escape deserving any more? We evidently require some other condition besides that of repentance; and the suitableness of this condition to the being combined with repentance, will depend on its furnishing the supply to the deficiency which we have been forced to acknowledge. And, if this be the criterion to which to bring a condition, you will readily determine the suitableness of that of faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is here that the scheme of Christianity opens before you, meeting in every point those wants which reason leaves unsuppiled. We learn through revelation that, compassionating the misery which the human race had brought upon itself, but willing, at the same time, to give an irresistible demonstration of his hatred of sin, God sent his own Son to die, the just for the unjust, and thus to reconcile to himself an alienated world. Without travelling beyond what is written, or without attempting too nicely to reduce what is written into a compact and definite system, we may assert that the forgiveness of sin is so associated with, and so dependent on, the sacrifice of Christ, that the one is in some great sense to be regarded as the cause, the other the effect; and without tracing narrowly the connection, we may at least find in the sacrifice of Christ an answer to those suspicions, and a solution of those difficulties which met us whilst we had no guidance but that of natural religion. For, if you suppose the Divine justice up in arms against the sinner, forbidding his being pardoned, unless satisfaction be made to the law which he has broken, you see how justice may be appeased and brought to consent to the sinner's forgiveness of sin ; when you view in Christ a voluntary substitute for the guilty, bearing in their stead the penalties which were due to transgression. Or, if you suppose the Divine holiness arrayed against the sinful, so that a being of unspotted purity must refuse all communion with the depraved, you see how holiness itself may sanction the acceptance of a man when you view in the atonement an arrangement for renewing degenerate nature.

It is the same with every Divine attribute and perfection. Whatever the obstacle it seems to place in the way of forgiveness you may prove that it disappears when forgiveness is associated with the sacrifice of Christ. And if the sacrifice of Christ do thus remove all the obstacles which appear to us to lie in the way of forgiveness, there can be no difficulty in admitting the suitableness of faith to the being combined with repentance as a condition : for faith is simply that through which, as an instrument or hand, we lay hold on and appropriate the results of Christ's obedience and death ; believing in the Saviour we become, through God's appointment, interested in what he did, and what he suffered ; it is put to our account, it is reckoned as having been done and endured individually for ourselves. So that, believing in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we pass into a position, not indeed of actual innocence, for nothing can destroy the fact that we have sinned, however completely the consequences of sin may be averted, but we pass into a position in which no claim can be substantiated against us which we cannot show to have been fully met and fully discharged. With every admission, then, that the appointment of a Mediator is amazing and overwhelming, presenting heights and depths which we shall probably be unable to reach and to explore in a loftier state of being as well as in our present, we cannot understand why men should object against the appointment, as though it did violence to reason, or as though it were inconsistent with the conclusions of natural religion. If, indeed, natural religion were able to demonstrate the necessary effectiveness of repentance, to establish, from the relations which subsist between the creature and the Creator, that pardon of sin must follow of course on contrition and amendment, we quite admit that a strong case would be made out against any need for the interference of a Mediator, and that there would, in consequence, be some ground for questioning, either, with the Deist, whether the Bible were inspired, or, with the Socinian, whether Christ's death were strictly a propitiatory sacrifice. But when the argument is all the other way, all against the supposed efficiency of repentance whilst uncombined with some other condition, we really see nothing which reason can have to do but to expect that something would be superadded to repentance, and to examine, when told that this something was faith in a Mediator, whether it met and supplied known wants and deficiencies.

It is to this point we have brought you : proving first of all that there is no such virtue in repentance as men have vainly supposed ; and then searching whether there be not in the provisions of the gospel of Christ, that which is wanting in mere contrition and amendment. If so, there can be nothing to object against the appointment of a Mediator, but, on the contrary, everything to induce us to accept that appointment with submission of the understanding, and with thankfulness of heart. We never can for a moment allow that the scheme of redemption may in itself be called incredible, that it could never gain credence unless through dint of accumulated testimony. Let a man who has pushed natural religion as far as it can be carried hear for the first time of the gospel of redemption, hear of it merely as a supposition, nothing being said as to the evidence which proves it a fact; and do you tell me that the supposition will appear to him so unlike what is wanted that he will treat it as the theory of one ignorant of his case? We tell you, on the contrary, our thorough conviction that he would at once admit that the supposition needed only to be a fact, and he should have before him the supply of every want which he had been able to detect. He might smile at the supposition as a beautiful fancy which could never be thought of as a reality, but he would never smile at it as an absurdity, or the dream of the Sciolist, who indulges his imagination without knowing the precise circumstances for which he endeavoured to invent relief. For natural religion has taught such a man that there is a reckoning against him which no after obedience can avail to wipe out, and that there are necessary perfections of God which he can see no mode of propitiating so as to prevent his utter condemnation; therefore is he prepared for the announcement of such a scheme as that of redemption through Christ—prepared for it in the sense of being ready at once to acknowledge its suitableness, though he may never have anticipated its existence. Let it, therefore, now not be the speculatist who has only a supposition or a theory to preach, but the missionary who has fact to substantiate, that approaches the true disciple of natural religion, and he will find a hearer quite disposed to the listening with favour to his statements. Let the missionary only make good that it is a fact, and not a mere theory, that he propounds, and, in place of repugnance to the mediatorial scheme as preposterous, there will be admiration of it as marvellously constructed to meet a great exigence, and thankfulness for it as rich in the supply of ascertained wants. We repudiate the notion that reason would prompt to the rejection of Revelation. There is an achievement of which reason is capable, the highest, if we may judge from the fact that, after weighing the mountains and counting the stars, it has often looked with contempt upon the Bible; and this achievement is that of finding out the moral wants of man and the difficulties which beset his obtaining favour with such a Being as God must necessarily be. This is the very limit of the doings of reason, the boundary of the discoveries of natural theology; but it is not beyond reason, it is not beyond natural theology. Let reason work under materials which are furnished by experience and conscience, work faithfully and fearlessly, and we tell you again and again, that it must reach the conclusion that we require precisely such a scheme as that of redemption through Christ, though such conclusion would only seem to leave us hopeless of deliverance. The philosopher who sits down in his study, and professes to argue out a demonstration of the incrediblity of the gospel—its incredibility, not on the score of defective evidence, but on the score of preposterous theory—why, he is a man who never thoroughly searched into himself, never deeply scrutinized the nature of sin, nor examined the light in which sin must be viewed by the Creator. Give me the man who has gone down into his own heart, who has pondered his fancies and weighed what he is able to do, and I shall find in him a man to whom the gospel of Christ will be as good news from a far country—too good, he may perhaps fear, to be true, but only needing to have its truth put beyond doubt to fill him with wonder, admiration, and praise. Such a man is quite aware of an outstanding debt which he cannot discharge, and therefore will he hail with delight a scheme of substitution which takes that debt away. Such a man is all alive to an array of Divine attributes requiring his condemnation, and therefore will he feel the fitness of an arrangement which brings those attributes to sanction his acquittal. Such a man is conscious of inability to obey thoroughly for the future, even if forgiven for the past, and therefore is he prepared to admire the ordinance which supplies the meritoriousness of another than himself. What! reason truly exercised prompt to the rejection of Revelation! Yes, when it shall prompt the man who feels himself drowning to push away the rope that is thrown to him by friendly hands. Yes, when it will prompt the man who sees his house in flames to despise the escape ladder lifted from below. But so long as reason, working out the scheme of natural religion, detects the wants of man, and Revelation making known the scheme of mediatorial interference, proposes the supply of those wants, they may tell me of what is philosophical, and what rational, and what credible; but I shall feel that it becomes me as an intelligent being, and yet a sinful—a being with a conscience, but that conscience witnessing against me—a being with a soul, but that soul in danger of everlasting perdition—that it becomes me to acknowledge, as both worthy of God, and adapted to myself, a proclamation which, like that of the Redeemer in our text, adds faith to penitence in what it demands from the sinful. "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel."

III. But we propose to examine, in the third and last place, the thorough harmony of the conditions laid down in our text with the blessed fact, that eternal life is God's free gift through Christ. There is no truth of which we should be more jealous than of that which ascribes our salvation undividedly to the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ; but nevertheless we cannot but regard those as greatly mistaken who would object to our speaking of conditions of salvation. There are conditions in the strictest and truest sense of the term; notwithstanding the absolute gratuitousness of salvation, its perfect independence of human deservings. I cannot be saved unless I repent; I cannot be saved unless I believe. Surely, then, repentance and faith are conditions, indispensable conditions; for a condition is that which must be performed before I can partake in some proffered benefit. And yet, my brethren, the conditions do not take off the least from the freeness of salvation. There may be nothing meritorious in the conditions, but nevertheless God may be pleased to impose those conditions, and to determine that he will not bestow the gift unless they be performed. What say you, if a number of his subjects have taken arms against their king, and lie, as a consequence of rebellion, exposed to his wrath, and if the monarch send them a message, telling them that he will forgive them and receive them back to his favour provided that—on condition that—they lay down their arms? Does it take off from the freeness of the pardon that the offer is thus made conditional? That it will not be granted to such as have still the sword in hand, but only to those who throw away the weapon or lay down the arms, but in no sense makes it obligatory on the king to forgive: it is in no sense the cause of forgiveness. The arms might have been laid down, and no forgiveness have followed. Wrath might have equally gone forth against the hardened traitor and against the submissive, though now the monarch in his wisdom and his clemency have resolved on striking down the one and pardoning the other. This is precisely our case: we are naturally in arms against God, having apostatized from his service, and leagued ourselves with his enemies. He sends us a gracious communication, announcing that he has made an arrangement for extending free pardon to those who have done him so much scorn and despite, and he states at the same time that he will not grant this pardon indiscriminately to all, but to such only as believe upon his Son. Well, does this take off from the freeness of the pardon? Not one jot. I am not pardoned for the sake of my repentance; I am not pardoned for the sake of my faith; and yet it hath pleased God to appoint that without repentance and faith I shall not be pardoned, but that with them I shall. Therefore do we address every one who may come within the sound of our voice as having much, very much to do if he hope to be saved; but we do not allow him to suppose that he will be saved because he does much. He has much to do; for repentance is a great work, not indeed to be effected without the aid of God's Spirit, but equally requiring our own diligence and our own earnestness—the denying ourselves, the cutting off the right hand, and the plucking out the right eye. And faith is a great work: like repentance, it is not to be obtained but through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, but nevertheless there is much which devolves on ourselves if we would be believers in Christ—the guarding against prejudice, the keeping the judgment unbiassed, the holding the truth in veneration, and, above all, the striving to live godly, forasmuch as "to the pure all things are pure, and unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Whilst, however, we summon men to labour and to sacrifice, we do not suffer them for a moment to imagine that they are to effect their own salvation, whether wholly or in part. Perish the theology that would represent man as dividing with Christ the redemption of the soul! Perish the theology which does not drive the sinner to the cross for his every hope, and bid him seek as one who has nothing wherewith to buy the inestimable blessings purchased by him who died thereon for sin! That which will save you is the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, to which you can add nothing—not a solitary fraction, but which is ample enough for the acceptance of the whole world, if the whole world would close with the proffered conditions. Through repentance and faith that merit is appropriated to yourselves, but, when appropriated it is as independent, as alone, in gaining entrance for you into heaven, as though there had been no conditions for its appropriation. You are to carry the passport in your hand; your carrying it in your hand is a condition of admission, but nevertheless the whole virtue is in the passport, and not in the tenacity with which it is held. "The time, then is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." Let the worldly-minded, the covetous, the careless, be warned to "seek the Lord while he may be found, to call upon him while he is near." We still take up the language of the text, and preach to you repentance and faith—repentance and faith which, if possessed at once, ere the anticipated time be gone, shall issue in salvation, but which must sooner or later be reached by all, when repentance can be only fierce remorse, and faith only maddening conviction: the remorse of Esau, of whom it is said, he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears; the conviction of demons, of whom it is fearfully alleged, "the devils believe and tremble." God grant unto all of us a different repentance and faith—repentance unto salvation not to be repented of—and that faith which, now laying hold on the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, will find at last that an entrance is administered unto it abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

AFFLICTION TO BE EXPECTED BY THE CHRISTIAN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JANUARY 29, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."—1 Peter iv. 12.

It is said by the wise man, in the book of Ecclesiastes—"That which hath been, is now; and that which is to be, hath already been; and God requireth that which is past." The assertion here is, that of there being great uniformity in the dealings of God; so that the history of any one generation is little more than the repetition of that of any other. "God requireth that which is past;" he seeks it again, he causes it to recur, so that "what hath been is now, and what shall be hath already been." From such a description of the dealings of God, it would follow, that there cannot in strict truth be anything "strange or uncommon," at least not to those who live in a remote age of the world; for nothing can happen to them, which has not often happened before, and for which, therefore, they might not have been prepared by due attention to the experience of others. If, indeed, the world were yet only in its infancy, so that there had been but little time for regarding the course of the Divine dispensations, much would of necessity be strange or uncommon, just because experience would as yet have been imperfect; but when there has been sufficient time for ascertaining how God may be expected to act, supposing him to act always on a uniform rule, there ought not in truth to be anything strange or uncommon. It cannot, strictly speaking, be strange, in the sense of nothing like it having happened before, for this were to deny that "God requireth that which is past;" and it can seem to us strange, only because we fail to perceive how God hath proceeded, and to note what he hath done aforetime in the world.

And what may be said of those who lived in the infancy of the world, may be said also of those who embraced a Christian profession, when Christianity had been but recently introduced by its Author. There was necessarily much, upon which experience could deliver no testimony; for there had been no time for putting things to the proof, and confidence in the promise was consequently not sustained by any instances of its performance. The case is evidently very different with ourselves and the earlier converts to Christianity, the difference being much the same as between the later and the first inhabitants of the world. We can appeal to the history of many ages for the workings of Christanity; we can show its predictions fulfilled, and its promises verified, in the progress of events and the experience of the church. But the first converts were obliged, in a great degree, to take all upon trust.

With them the whole was matter of experiment; experiment, inasmuch as, though they had the warrant of God's Word on their side, they had no evidence of the accomplishment of that Word, but must wait for it in the course of their own eventful lives. There was therefore great room, as it would seem, for what was "strange" in their case, though not in our own. There can now happen to the true Christian nothing, for which he might not have been prepared, had he duly studied the history of the church, and familiarized himself with God's dealings with those who believe upon his Son. His own experience may not be an exact copy of that of any one of his predecessors in the faith; but there shall be nothing in it which has not been experienced before, the parallel to which may not be found in the history of some other believer, and therefore nothing which ought to come upon him unexpectedly, or to take him, as it were, by surprise. But it was not thus with the earlier Christians. They could not, in the same sense or degree, go to the past for lines with which to map the present or the future. They were themselves to furnish experience for those who came after; but had scarcely any power of appealing to the experience of those who went before.

And yet in one great particular, it appears from our text that there is no difference between the earliest and the later converts, so far as the anticipation of God's dealings is concerned. With ourselves it amounts almost to a truism, that they who "will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," and that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven." To suppose a man now entering upon a Christian profession, and yet not expecting to meet with many afflictions, is to suppose him wilfully ignorant of what the church has in every age testified by her sighs and her tears. But the same can hardly be said of the earlier Christians. They had embraced the religion of One, whom prophecy had described by the auspicious title of "Prince of peace;" whom seers of old had beheld in visions, glowing, and tranquil, and beautiful. And might they not, therefore, have justly expected that their lot would be one of freedom from trouble? 'Not so,' says the apostle; 'Whatever your trials, whatever your temptations, they are not such as you may justly account "strange." You have no right to be amazed at them, as though they were not to have been looked for.'

And we think that this assertion of his is full of interest and instruction. Let us give ourselves to its careful examination. St. Peter is addressing those, who had embraced Christianity on its first introduction, when there had been but little experience to assure them that sorrows must encompass the Christian; and who might perhaps have anticipated from the glorious descriptions of the kingdom of the Messiah, that they should enjoy visibly, as well as actually, the favour of God. What saith the apostle to these converts? He did not deny that they had undergone tribulations; he was ready to tell them of still greater in store; for days of fiery trial were coming on the church. Perhaps they did not reckon upon this. They are surprised, amazed, confounded; but nevertheless, they ought to have expected this; for I say unto you, (and upon this saying we are to fasten your attention,) "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."

I. Now, we would observe that, if trial or temptation in general may be affirmed to be no strange thing, but what man must expect and experience in every age whether of the world or of the church, then were there more points of correspondence than of difference between the Christian and the Jewish dispensation. We are too apt to regard the one, as having, in the largest and most literal sense, been swept away to make room for the other; just as though they were opposite systems, which might arise in succession, but could not co-exist. It is true that they could not co-exist, but not because they were in any measure opposed the one to the other. The dawn and the noon-tide cannot co-exist; yet the one does not so much displace the other, as it is that other in a more advanced stage. The Mosaic economy was the Christian in its dawn, or in its bud, presenting the same truths, though in a more shadowy form, and proposing the same way of salvation, though with less clearness and precision. The Christian dispensation superseded the Jewish, but only in the manner in which history supersedes prophecy, when events which had long been set forth in the predictions of seers, come to pass on the theatre of the world. And this must necessarily have been the case, if you only consider how God had from the first determined the plan of our redemption, and virtually announced it, ere Adam was driven from Paradise, with the promise that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." There was not one way of being saved in one age, and another in another, whether as to the mode of reconciliation between man and God, or as to the method in which the merits of Christ are made available to individual salvation. In all ages there has been the same necessity for a renewal of nature, and for a great moral change, in order to a meetness for the kingdom, which the Mediator was to open; and therefore must it be supposed, that in all ages the dealings of God with a view to these ends have borne in the main the same features. But undoubtedly God had from the first made sorrow one of his chief engines in weakening attachment to the things of time and sense, and directing the affections towards heaven. The history of the church has always been a record of troubles and persecutions. The patriarchs were wanderers, and often sorely tried, whilst the prophets and righteous men of the law had frequently to exclaim, that "tears had been their meat day and night." Was it, therefore, for a moment to be expected, that because there came a dispensation of greater light, a dispensation of substance in the place of shadow, of reality in place of type, sorrow was to depart, and no longer to be used in preparing men for heaven? Nay, there might have been some inconsiderate enough to cherish such a thought, and to fancy that because at length the Redeemer himself had appeared, there was thenceforward to be exemption from grief and affliction; but even these could not have said, that any "strange thing" had occurred, when a "fiery trial" was appointed them by God. It was but the necessary continuance of a discipline, which had been in practice from the first; and if they had imagined that the discipline was to end, at least there was nothing, whether in the nature of the case or in the declarations of God, to warrant the opinion.

And, indeed, my brethren, without tracing accurately a sameness in the dealings of God, we might venture to say, that the discipline of affliction is indispensable in the case of depraved creatures like ourselves. It is not that under this economy, but not under that, sorrow is a wholesome thing for those, whose nature is corrupt; it is rather, that in every condition and estate, man cannot do without affliction, if he is to be kept up to the task of preferring the future to the present. Affliction, therefore, in the largest and strictest sense, is no strange thing. There is such a tendency in sinful nature to the attaching itself to earth, and to the making its home below, that we might almost pronounce it impossible to gain a due ascendancy for heaven and heavenly things, were there not a frequent wrench, a warning in and through some inroad of calamity, that there is no rock on which to build, unless we build for eternity. Whilst our nature remains what it is—whilst even in men renewed by the Spirit of God, there are sinful propensities which they must constantly watch, but which they can scarcely hope to eradicate, we may justly speak of the discipline of affliction as almost indispensable; or if not indispensable, (for that might seem to limit the resources of God,) at least so important, that we, with our limited intelligence, can see nothing which might be substituted in its place. God forbid that we should think, that though sorrows have been made so largely the portion of the church, the church might have been spared what is so bitter and so dark. I have every confidence in the literal truth of the words—"God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men;" they are words which amount to an assertion, that he would dispense with affliction if he could,—if, that is, our welfare could be as much consulted through any other means. We may almost be said to have forced it upon God; to have left him no choice but to smite us, if, indeed, he adhere to his gracious purpose to save us. And therefore trouble is not, and cannot be, the characteristic of one dispensation as distinguished from another. So far as we can tell, it is the necessary characteristic of every dispensation, if sinful beings are its subjects and their sanctification is its object; so that the man, who in whatever age of the world should look with amazement on the gatherings of trouble, as though he had not expected this species of discipline, would only show himself forgetful of God's ordinary course, and prove that he but little understood the medicine required by his disease. Hard it may be, bitter it may be, but "strange" it can never be, that whilst "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," God should constantly verify the saying, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." And it might be a company of men, whom God had brought into covenant with himself in the earlier ages of the world, over whom the storm was impending,—or of those who lived whilst the Jewish temple yet stood, and its priests were dimly shadowing the glories of redemption, or, again, of believers in God, whether in remote times or near, who knew redemption as an accomplished thing, forasmuch as the Redeemer had "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;" but none of them could have right, as they looked upon the clouds, as though charged with the thunder, to protest that they were entering on a discipline for which there had been nothing to prepare them. 'Are ye not men?' might be the address of the messenger of God: 'are ye not sinners? and is it not your sanctification which is proposed? Oh! then, "beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."

II. But possibly these remarks, on what we may call the necessity for affliction, and therefore on the truth that it ought never to seem "strange," hardly clear up the point which is presented by our text. The case of those addressed by St. Peter is not that of men exposed to trouble in its ordinary sense, but of those on whom was coming a great onset of persecution. Was there nothing strange in this? Think on what Christianity is—a religion of peace and good will; think on its doctrines—doctrines which breathe the spirit of universal love; think on its disciples—men who, if their lives be but consistent with its principles, labour in every way to raise the character and improve the condition of their fellow-creatures: and are you not tempted to account it "strange," that just as though the system were one that made war upon human happiness, the world should have combined to effect its extermination? What is strange, if it be not strange that heaven's best gift should be received with loathing; that the very remedy, which at an immeasurable cost God prepared for the disorders and evils which have pressed on this creation, should meet not only with scorn, but hatred; that the beings whom it designed to benefit, should agree with themselves to cast it out from the earth? And possibly something of this feeling may have had place in the earlier converts. Enchanted themselves with the blessedness which they saw that Christianity was adapted to diffuse, and imagining that others would view it in the same light, and extend to it the same welcome, they may have stood aghast, when they found the world up in arms, and themselves objects of hatred and vengeance, simply because they had embraced this benevolent system. Yet the apostle does not hesitate to tell them in our text, that nothing "strange" had happened to them, when a "fiery trial" arose and they had to maintain their profession in the face of persecution and death. And was it strange that the gospel should be disliked, and its professors hunted down? We admit, in the largest sense, that the tendencies of Christianity are to the production of the greatest possible amount of happiness, attainable under the present circumstances of the world. But then, it must not be forgotten, that in eradicating what sin has sown, and covering the earth with the lost flowers of Paradise, Christianity works by a moral transformation, and that it is through improving human character that it proposes the improvement of human condition. The direct assault of the system is on the vices of our nature. The only method which it tries—and we are not now to prove that no other is available—the only method which it tries for diminishing our wretchedness, is that of diminishing our wickedness. The results which Christianity proposes, and which beyond all question it is calculated to effect, are those of a wide-spread peace and a dominant happiness: but the processes, through which it would work out these results, are those of self-denial and restraint, of mortified passions and curbed affections; and they who would be quite in love with the results, may be quite at war with the processes.

So that, after all, hostility to the gospel and persecution of its professors are no strange things. There is a direct contrariety between the tendencies of the Christian religion and the tendencies of our nature,—and if there were not, the one could be no remedy for the disorders of the other; but if the tendencies of the two be thus in direct opposition, what marvel, what "strangeness," if men bent upon following out their sinful propensities, desire to get rid of a system, which holds them up to their own condemnation, and therefore to exterminate its advocates, whose very lives preach to them their error and their danger? Nay, there can be strangeness only to those, who know not themselves. It is not strange, that the willing slaves of their passions should dislike that which would emancipate them, nor that they who resolve to continue in sin should hate those who would disturb them. It is not strange, that the avaricious, the sensual, the proud, should rage furiously against a system, which can prevail only by forcing on them a change, from which they shrink with utter abhorrence. It is not strange, that they who cannot bring themselves to conform to a religion of self-denial should exert themselves for the disproving and exterminating what can be true only if they are fatally in error, and must make good its truth by their thorough destruction. Let the sword be unsheathed, let the fire be kindled, let the banded power be set to hunt down the followers of Christ; and I may lament over it, but I cannot wonder at it. It is nothing to me, that Christianity tends directly and powerfully to the "beating the sword into the ploughshare," to the quenching every fire of discord, and to the binding the remotest families of earth in one close and indissoluble brotherhood. It cannot beat the sword into the ploughshare, till it have first broken the proud heart of man; it cannot extinguish the fires of discord, unless it first extinguish the yet fiercer fires of lust; it cannot make brothers of men, except by making them penitent, humble, and holy. Then till Christianity be universal, persecution, in some form or other, is unavoidable. It is not the product of a dark age, rather than of a light; it is the product of human nature—the same in its corruption, acted upon by a system the same in its holiness. It did not belong especially to the first ages of Christianity, when there was heathenism for its antagonist, in all the strength which it had been gathering in long ages of superstition; it belongs to all ages alike, the change being in what it dares rather than in what it desires, and nothing being wanted but similarity of circumstances to produce similarity of outrage. And the apostle might have called together the converts, when as yet the necessary dislike of the world to Christianity had not shown itself in fierce and open hostility; he might have been commissioned to tell them of a season near at hand, when, as though they had been beasts of prey, the pest and curse of society, there would be let loose against them all the horrors of a desperate assault, and that on no other ground than their Christian profession, and they might have received this communication with some measure of surprise, having confined themselves to the meditating on the blessedness which Christianity was adapted to generate, and having thought little of the processes through which it was to work; but the apostle might have said to them—'Know ye not what the world is? know ye not what Christianity is?—the world, a world lying in wickedness—Christianity, a religion of righteousness? How can these meet without a fearful collision? Nay, beloved, grieve if you will, that through human corruption the Prince of peace should have virtually come to send a sword, but "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.'"

III. But we cannot suppose, that St. Peter used these remarkable words, in order merely to correct an erroneous impression which had been made on the minds of the first Christians—an impression as to the likelihood that Christianity would disarm rather than provoke opposition: we may further believe, that he designed to offer a topic of consolation and support—to suggest what ought to reconcile the suffering to their lot.

And there is no such interesting point of view, under which to consider our text, as when we take it as presenting a motive why we should bear meekly the affliction which God may be pleased to allot. The stress, you observe, is made to lie on there being no novelty, nothing "strange" in the fiery trial which was coming on the church. 'You ought not,' St. Peter seems to say, 'to be amazed or confounded; you are called to no affliction which others have not sustained; and where there is nothing but what has been experienced, why should there be surprise, as though it were unexpected?' And truly the distressing and alarming thing to a believer would be, if he were able to show that God's dealings with himself were quite different from what God's dealings with his people had ordinarily been. Suppose the registered course of God's proceedings had been, that where there was belief in his Word, there was comparative freedom from trouble, so that religion and temporal happiness went hand in hand: what a fearful thing would it then be, for a Christian to find himself in trouble! It would not be the amount of the trouble, so much as its strangeness, that would overwhelm him. His inference would be—'Surely I am not one of the people of God: if I were, he would not deal with me in so unusual a manner.' Or if, again, in place of exemption generally from affliction, there were any one form of sorrow which was seldom allowed to visit the righteous, would not the being visited by this form distract the godly man, not because the form itself might be more terrific than he had known before, but because, being strange, it would seem to bring proof that he had deceived himself with regard to his spiritual condition. But take the opposite, which is the actual case, namely, that the Christian has nothing strange to undergo, nothing befalling him but what is common to believers; and do you not perceive that this very circumstance is full of consolation, and ought to do much towards producing in him patience and resignation? When trouble comes upon him, under whatsoever form, he can say to himself—'At least there is no proof in this that my heart is not right with God; this is only what his people have always had to bear, and I should have had therefore greater cause for uneasiness, had my path been all smooth, than I have now, that I meet occasionally with what is rugged and difficult.' He is perhaps met by persecution; friends are alienated from him because of his religion; enemies are raised up, who do their utmost to injure and thwart him. All this is hard to bear; but he remembers that all this has been the portion of the righteous in every age, and therefore, feeling that he is but sharing the afflictions of God's people, he comforts himself with the thought that he shall share also their triumphs. He has, perhaps, to undergo a large measure of domestic trial; death makes frequent inroads into his family, his circumstances become straitened, his children requite him with ingratitude; but he looks into the history of the righteous, and he finds that there is nothing singular in his portion. His predecessors in faith have also been his predecessors in grief; and it does much towards stanching his tears, to know that they have been wept by the bright company already in heaven. Or again, (and this may be the worst of all,) he has seasons of spiritual darkness, and times when an eclipse passes over the Sun of righteousness, and he loses all comfortable sense of the love of God and the atonement made by Christ; but is he peculiar in this? Has nothing like this been experienced by the believer? He turns to the book of Psalms, that book which is inestimable, as being the book of religious experience, and what does he find? Unmingled joy? unclouded assurance? Oh; no! he finds constant alternation, as though night followed day, depression succeeded in necessary order to exultation. In one verse it is—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" In another it is—"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Or he turns to the lives of righteous men—men respecting whom, if he may dare to anticipate the decisions of the judgment, he is thoroughly assured that they are entered into rest; and he observes, that what they described of themselves is nothing but the counterpart of what he experiences. They were not always exulting; they had their times of darkness and depression; and it comes almost like a ray of light into his soul, to observe what clouds have hung over the righteous, and it is as though his own burden were diminished, when he sees how heavy has been theirs.

Without staying to see the different degrees of strength which the text possesses at different times, we may fairly press upon you the truth, that the fact of not having to endure what is "strange," should at all times do much towards bringing the believer to endure it with patience; yea, rather with thankfulness. I do feel it an immeasurable privilege, that we live in days when God's course of dealing with the righteous has been ascertained to us by a long line of witnesses. Others may exult that they were not born when philosophy was in its infancy, when arts and sciences had scarcely struggled into life, but that they took their place on the theatre of this earth, when men of mighty grasp had busied themselves with the secrets of nature, and so opened them up as to enlarge immeasurably the span of human knowledge and human comfort. There is no reason why as Christians we should be insensible to these advantages. It is something, it is much, even if you think not of the light which science, as it marches, is ever shedding on the works and Word of God, it is much that we live in days when the stars have been made familiar things to man, when the elemental powers have been subjected to human bidding, and mysteries which not only baffled but appalled an earlier generation have resolved themselves into appliances for helping forward our purposes. But the Christian's privilege goes far beyond this. The later day is the more precious, but not so much because of the multiplied achievements of the astronomer, the profound discoveries of the chemist, and the gigantic triumphs of the engineer, as because he can send back his gaze over a long line of records of the church, a line thronged with beckoning forms which show him the heavenward path, and tell him its nature as well as its end. It is much for him, that these forms embrace every possible variety. The patriarch is there, struggling amid the shadows of an imperfect revelation; the prophet is there, straining his vision that he may catch the day of the Redeemer; the priest is there, gathering truth from complicated figures; the apostle, throwing himself into conflict with the idolatries of the the world; the martyr, with his robe of flame; the saint with the various hindrances of a nature still corrupt; the mourner, with every day some fresh cause of tears; the widow, in the agony of her bereavement; the orphan, in the coldness of his desertion; the poor man, in the straitness of his penury; the rich man, in the entanglements of his abundance; the dispirited, in the gloom of his melancholy—all are there; so that, come what may, the Christian can find his own case, his own trials, his own difficulties, ay, find them not preventing, but actually issuing in his glory. Therefore there can be nothing in his portion to give cause for suspicion that he is not right with God, because there can be nothing which he may not prove to have happened to numbers of God's people before. A new dealing would confound him, simply because it was new; for if new, his experience would be an exception to the experience of the church; he might therefore justly question whether he was indeed abiding in Christ. But "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," he can always show that there is nothing new in what God appoints. The tempest may rage, the sword may glitter, the destroyer may ravage; but he is calm, he is quiet, he is confident, because he can never "think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try him, as though some strange thing had happened unto him."

IV. Now we have, lastly, to observe, that perhaps the more literal translation of the passage would be, "Be not strange in fiery trial." What St. Peter enjoins on Christians may be, that when the fiery trial came, they were not to receive it as an unexpected thing; they were not to be like strangers, but rather to show that they had been waiting the onset, and had prepared themselves to meet it. This it is, not to be "strange concerning the fiery trial;" to have looked so steadfastly and constantly for its coming, that we are not taken by surprise, but submit to it as that which we never thought of avoiding. And the injunction, thus understood, is not so much a precept as to what we are to do when actually under affliction, as an admonition to prepare ourselves for affliction. A man must be strange in affliction, if affliction come upon him unawares. He alone can be not strange in affliction, who has kept himself expecting it, and who, acting on the expectation, has endeavoured to arm himself for the shock. And we may fairly say, judging from the too frequent demeanour of Christians when in sorrow—demeanour as of persons stunned by a sudden blow, that there is but little heed to St. Peter's injunction. Why is the parent so strange in his trial when his favourite child has died? Because he did not use himself to the thinking of that child as likely to die: he garnered up his heart in him, as an enduring good, so that his death has been stupefying and unlooked for. Why is the man on whom want has suddenly come so strange in his poverty? Because he had not habituated himself to the regarding his riches as uncertain, to the contemplating their departure as amongst likely, or even possible things; he had not duly taken into account that riches make to themselves wings, and therefore when they have flown he is bewildered and amazed as though some strange thing had happened unto him. Why are men so startled at the approach of death? In nine cases out of ten death comes to men strangely as if they expected not to die, or not to die so soon. Why is this? Because death has been kept out of mind; it has not been steadily contemplated as that which will occur at any moment, and therefore when it approaches the Christian is confounded: he was manifestly not looking for death, and he shrinks back as from a foe of whom he had never been told. How important, then, is the admonition, Beloved, be not strange in the fiery trial, as though some strange thing had happened unto you. We do not tell you that you should always be anticipating trials, distressing yourselves with imaginary evils as though the actual ones of to-day were not sufficiently great. Nevertheless on the principle that you are but "strangers and pilgrims upon the earth," you ought always to be in the attitude of expectants of trouble, holding your blessings with a slack hand, as those ready to resign them as soon as recalled, and reckoning on trouble as belonging to your portion, though the measure or nature of it is not defined. Alas! in place, apparently of being at all prepared for what has happened, Christians, when overtaken by calamity, for the most part wonder at its occurrence; they talk of its strangeness, its mysteriousness; so that there is very much the same expression of surprise, notwithstanding the assertions of resignation as though there had been some inexplicable phenomena, some prodigy which had come without any warning, and departed without any solution. This could not be if Christians accustomed themselves to the contemplating the troubles which are likely to fall to their lot, if they regarded their possessions as only lent to them, and liable at any moment to be recalled. It would wondrously diminish the trials when they come, were you thus to be always awaiting their coming. An old writer justly says, "Things certainly fall the lighter upon us when they first fall upon our thoughts." It is the being "strange" in sorrow, which makes sorrow so hard; and we want you not to be strange in it; we want you to prepare yourselves for it, by calmly looking it in the face, as that which may at any time come; and continually praying for such measures of grace, as shall enable you to meet it. We are not now speaking to those under affliction; their case was met by the first explanation of the passage, which bade them not suppose that there was any thing strange in trial, even though like that of the early church, it might be described as "the fiery trial." But we speak now to those who are exempt from affliction, though of course exposed every moment to its onset; and our simple counsel to them is, that they use the season of exemption in preparing for the season of endurance. Afflictions are befalling others; remember that "you also are in the body," and that your turn is probably not very distant. Arm yourselves, therefore, beforehand; it is bad to have your weapons to seek, when the foe is upon you. We cannot conclude better than with the words of Archbishop Leighton—"Be still humble, and depend on the strength of Christ, and seek to be previously furnished with distrust of thyself, and much trust in him, with much denial of thyself, and much love to him. This preparing and training of the heart may prove useful, and make it more dexterous when brought to real conflict. In all both beforehand and in the time of trial, make the Lord Jesus all thy strength. That is our only way in all to be conquerors; yea, 'more than conquerors through him that loved us.'" May God grant to us all such blessings as these!

CHRIST COME FOR JUDGMENT.

A Sermon

Delivered on Tuesday Morning, February 5, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."—John ix. 39.

Last Tuesday I addressed you on a subject which ought to have especially commended itself to those who are Christians indeed as well as in name, those who have reason to hope that they "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth." We showed you that there was nothing strange in the fiery trial with which true Christians are so generally visited, and that the faithfulness of God ensured to all such the being so carried through the trial as to be at last "more than conquerors." It were a pleasant thing could we always select such topics of discourse, and deal with you all as with those who had chosen the good path and were stedfastly walking therein. But, as the trumpet must not give an uncertain sound, neither must it always take the same note. To-morrow we enter on the season of Lent—the season especially of self-examination, of contrition, of humiliation before God, the ashes in the heart, the sackcloth on the soul. We must adapt our sermon to the season; we must remember that but too possibly there are the careless amongst you who require to be aroused, the indifferent who require to be alarmed, the sluggish who need to be quickened. Therefore, wonder not if we take a solemn, and almost startling, topic of discourse.

We have often spoken to you of Jesus as coming to redeem, as coming "to seek and to save that which was lost;" prepare now for Lent by listening to him in another character, as he exclaims: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."

He had just performed the amazing miracle of the giving sight to a man that had been born blind; and the chapter from which our text is taken records the earnest but fruitless endeavours of the Pharisees to throw doubt upon the miracle, or to get rid of the testimony of Christ's supernatural power. Our text may be regarded as the comment of our Lord on the whole transaction. Referring to his having given sight to the blind man, and to the obstinacy with which those who prided themselves on their discernment resisted his claims, he declares that he had come down to earth for the purposes of judgment; not indeed to judge or inflict punishment in secular matters, for this he always disclaimed, but to discover men's secret characters, and to execute spiritual judgment upon them; that the poor, and the ignorant, and simple Jews, and even the benighted Gentiles, should be made wise to discern the things of God; and at the same time those who were proud of their superior knowledge, learning, and wisdom, would be shown that they were blind in spiritual things, and would have their eyes judicially closed. Now, you must all agree that the gospel, as published by Christ, is here represented as producing in some way or another an injury to many of its hearers. Christ comes not only to give sight, but to give blindness, that they which see—that they, that is, who fancied they had full power of spiritual vision—might be made blind. The words can mean nothing, if they do not mean that the condition of many would become worse than before through that interference of a Mediator which should have wrought them vast spiritual benefit. But was this only the result, or was it in any degree the design of the coming of Christ? In other words, was it intended, ordained, or appointed by God that many should be made blind? or came it to pass merely through human perverseness irrespective altogether of the Divine determination? This is a weighty question, though the language of the text seems so precise as to leave little room for debate upon the answer. It is, you observe, expressly said: "For judgment I am come into this world." And then a purpose is indicated—'I am come in order that certain results might ensue.' We see not, therefore, how to avoid classing our text with passages which are amongst the most startling and mysterious contained in the Bible, and which seem to represent God as placing men under the gospel, and the ordinary means of salvation, for the very purpose of ensuring or increasing their condemnation. You must all be aware that there are such passages in Scripture; and you must all, if accustomed to ponder what you read, have been struck with the strangeness of what seems to be their tenor. Take, for example, the words which occur in the prophecies of Isaiah—"And the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, line upon line, that they might go and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." Here the express design of the reiterated announcement of the word of the Lord to a people is apparently represented as nothing less than the destruction of the people. And nearly akin to this is what the aged Simeon affirmed when he took up the infant Christ in the temple—"Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." We know not how to deal with these and similar passages, if it be not allowed that they indicate purpose, design, and determination on the part of the Almighty; we cannot satisfy ourselves with saying that nothing more is intended than a statement of what would actually come to pass; that Simeon represented the child as set for the fall of many, only because the perverseness of many would turn the gospel into a stumbling block, or that Christ affirmed himself come, that they who so see might be made blind, simply because he knew that many would wilfully close their eyes against him. We must go farther than this. We may indeed be surrounded by difficulties the moment we allow that the passages in question indicate design or ordinance of God. But honesty of interpretation appears to demand the admission, and it is therefore our business to meet the difficulties fairly, not to avoid them by any forced exposition.

We assume, then, that the words which are now under review, and which we have shown to have their parallel in other parts of the Bible, denote a purpose of God, not merely a result brought round through the perverseness of man. This being assumed, your minds would quite naturally suggest two inquiries, to each of which we shall devote a section of our discourse. In the first place, it will be asked, and we have, therefore, to examine—what is to be understood by Christ's coming for judgment, in order to cause that those who saw "might be made blind;" and, in the second place, the question will then arise, and answer must be sought, as to the consistency of such ordinance with the known attributes of the Almighty.

I. Now, however different men's opinions may be in regard to the decrees and the determinations of God, all confess that the divine foreknowledge is unbounded, so that nothing can occur which has not been foreseen. Of course, there is the widest possible difference, we must all be aware, between acknowledging the foreknowledge, and acknowledging the predestination of God. The foreknowledge of an event does not necessarily suppose any connection with its production; but the predestination of an event supposes a fixedness, so that it must come to pass. Whilst all men must confess that God's foreknowledge is unlimited, no man can affirm this of his predestination—for this would be to make all actions the result of immutable decrees, and thus virtually to charge upon the Creator every sin of the creature. We cannot doubt that God foreknows every deed of every individual, so that we cannot commit the offence, which has not, from all eternity, been present to the Divine mind; but, at the same time, we cannot doubt that we are perfectly free in the commission of the offence—that we commit it simply because we choose, not because it has been predetermined by God. Now, is it merely the foreknowledge, or is it also the predestination of God which is referred to by Christ in the words of our text? No one, of course, has any difficulty in allowing that God must have foreknown that in consequence of Christ's coming many would be made blind; the reception that was given to Christ was thoroughly ascertained, and therefore the increased condemnation of which his coming would be at least the occasion; but this will hardly justify the saying, that Christ came for judgment—you must introduce the predestination as well as the foreknowledge of the Son; you must suppose that God not only foresaw, but that he actually predetermined that many should be made blind. What are we to understand by this? What precisely was it which God is represented as decreeing or appointing? Let us look both at the Jews and at ourselves, and endeavour in each case to ascertain how Christ may have come "for judgment that they which see might be made blind."

First, as to the Jews. Through long ages had the Jews been signally favoured of God, so that whilst other nations of the earth had only the faint light of traditional religion, they were privileged with revelation, taught through a succession of prophets and seers. And you well know that their advantages, so far from being improved, were abused and perverted by the great mass of the people; and that, as century passed after century, and the time drew nigh which God had fixed for the descent of his Son, the chosen seed became more and more depraved, more desperate in their wickedness, though as confident as ever in their relation to Jehovah. Thus the iniquity of the children was added to the iniquity of the fathers, and the accumulation became so mighty that the day of retribution could not long be deferred. The day approached. And after a protracted season of long suffering, God resolved to cast off the posterity of Abraham. It was not—and this we ask you carefully to observe—it was not only because they crucified Christ that the edict went forth, and the Jews were rejected and abandoned of God. By this fearful act, they indeed filled up the measure of their iniquity and immeasurably aggravated the condemnation which had for ages been gathering; but if the Redeemer had appeared in any other section of the earth, and been put to death without the instrumentality of the Jews, we must believe that heavy punishment would still have come down on the profligate race, and that they would have been overtaken by that vengeance which is not the less sure because long deferred. Indeed, it seems hardly possible to read the histories of the New Testament and not to conclude that even whilst Jesus was working his miracles, and publishing his gospel, many in Israel were already given over to judicial blindness, that "seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand." It might almost be said that they rejected Christ, because themselves rejected of God; their continued abuse and prostitution of mercies, their pride, their profligacy, having procured for them that worst of all inflictions—their being left to themselves, abandoned to follow their own wills, and therefore to work out their own ruin. Can you doubt—after knowing the fact that, notwithstanding all the signs which he gave them of superhuman benevolence and power, Christ was from the first despised and at last adjudged to a shameful death by multitudes of his countrymen—can you doubt that the Jews as a nation stood already ripe for the vengeance of heaven? that whether or not they had been suffered to proceed to the very extremity of guilt and crucify the Lord of glory, they were so far gone in alienation from God that their rejection could not have been distant? If God had not given them the opportunity of consummating their wickedness by the most atrocious act ever wrought upon the earth, their iniquities were already so flagrant, their hardness of heart, their impenitence so confirmed and unsurmountable, that we must believe that Jerusalem would have been speedily overthrown, and its inhabitants scattered as chaff before the wind. God had exhausted, if we may venture the expression, the resources of his lovingkindness, dealing in vain with a stiffnecked generation; and now must he assume a new character and appear as that awful Being "to whom vengeance belongeth." But what shall be the instrumentality which he employs in punishing those whom he had long laboured to bless? Why, Christ shall come "for judgment, that those who saw might be made blind." The time approaches; ordained in the divine counsels, when the promised seed of the woman must appear upon the earth, and work out the great business of human redemption; this being must die—for "without shedding of blood there is no remission;" and God determines that the Jews shall be the murderers. The Jews were ripe for vengeance; they had abused all their privileges; they had turned their blessings into curses: now, how shall they be punished? Shall they be punished through never beholding the Messiah? Shall they be punished through never hearing the gospel? Oh! that were comparative exemption, and not punishment! They shall be punished through having the Christ born in the midst of them; they shall be punished by his walking their streets, and healing their sick, and entering their houses; they shall be punished by being brought into actual contact with deliverance, having salvation within reach, and being entreated to accept things which belong to their peace! Yes, this shall be the instrumentality through which is brought on a hardened people the most tremendous devastation that divine wrath ever wrought. With a distinct foreknowledge that they would prove his murderers, God determined to send his Son to his people whom he was about to cast off for their iniquities; he determined to send him for this very purpose amongst others, that they might consummate their guilt by perpetrating his crucifixion, and perish through the very means which had been provided for their escape. As there might have been more than foreknowledge on the part of God, that the Jews would reject their Messiah, and even go the dreadful length of putting him ignominiously to death; over and above this foreknowledge, though grounded upon it, the Almighty may have actually determined to employ the hardened Jews as his instruments, to make them at one and the same time his agents for effecting the sacrifice of Christ and their utter ruin. Well, therefore, might the Redeemer, now that his coming was but introductory to the desolations which the Jews had been for centuries provoking, knowing that the very engines of salvation were those who in the depraved generation would work out a deserved and determined punishment; well might he exclaim; "For judgment I am come: I who am the Prince of peace, I through whom God will reconcile the world unto himself; I who am come to seek and to save that which is lost; I who am the light of the world; for judgment am I come, that not only may those which see not see, but that they which see might be made blind."

We shall, however, more clearly understand the alleged ordinance or determination of God, if we pass from the acts of the Jews to ourselves, and see whether Christ may not have come for judgment that some amongst us might be made blind. We can discover no reason why such a case should be pronounced unsupposable. We can quite imagine that individuals, the sensual, the proud, the prejudiced, who say that they see, may have brought themselves into the condition of the Jews at the time of Christ's Advent—a condition in which they are alienated, abandoned by the Spirit, left to harden more and more, and confirm themselves in worldly-mindedness, and impenitence. We learn from Scripture that there is such a period as the day of grace—a period which is not necessarily of the same length with the day of life. We are bound therefore to believe that instances may occur in a Christian community of men who have outlived opportunities of repentance, and who present to higher orders of intelligence the terrible spectacle of creatures doomed before they die, forsaken of God even whilst they yet stand upon the scene of probation; and God may not withdraw from these men the means of grace; on the contrary, he may double, as he did with the Jews, all their spiritual advantages: Christ still comes to them—but he comes for judgment only, that the judicial blindness may be made more inveterate. As God still suffers his sun to arise on them and his rain to descend, he may continue and even increase their every moral privilege. Men with whom his Spirit no longer strives, on whom therefore, the messages of the Bible can only fall as waters upon the rock; these may come regularly to our churches, and hear sermon upon sermon, and present themselves to all the engines of ministerial attack. There may be nothing accidental in this—this may be what God actually ordains and appoints; God may determine that the gospel which has been often heard in vain shall continue to be heard, and that, too, for the very purpose of increasing condemnation; and whensoever such case occurs, Christ comes in order that, for the very intent that, "they which see might be made blind." Awful thing to think—but alas! only too possible—that there may be some amongst yourselves who have attended, year after year, on the ministration of the word, but who still continue blinded by the god of this world, who may now be suffered to remain under the preaching of the gospel for purposes, not so much of mercy, but of judgment! There may be even in this congregation some before whom the method of salvation has been repeatedly and faithfully placed, who have been admonished times without number to consider their ways, warned by the terrors of hell, and invited by the happiness of heaven, to "seek the Lord while he may be found," and who have continued indifferent under all this agency, boasting perhaps their knowledge, and feeling not their want of any spiritual illumination. And it is quite possible that punishment may already have commenced on these men; it is quite possible that God has determined in just judgment on their protracted impenitence to leave them to themselves, and thus hath he passed the sentence of which that at the last judgment shall be only the echo. What is the sentence? What is the punishment? Oh! it may be that the doom of these men is merely that they shall continue to hear the gospel preached, and preached with increased fervency and fulness; that they shall fill their accustomed places in the sanctuary, and add every week to that amount of abused privilege which is to be throughout eternity a millstone round the neck—for it puts more blindness into the eye, and therefore more darkness into the everlasting portion, to hear faithful sermons, but remain unconverted; the more zealous a ministry, the better fitted is it to work into greater apathy, and therefore seal for fiercer vengeance those whom it fails to incite to contrition. Thus may their very pastor be the employed engine in effecting the heightened condemnation of some of their number.

The individuals whose case we have described—if such there be amongst us—will be present on successive occasions when we shall delineate the offices of a Mediator, when we shall strive to lead our hearers to the scenes of crucifixion and resurrection, when, with all the power and persuasiveness which God may enable us to use, we shall set forth equally the promises and the threatenings of the gospel; but they may be present—we almost tremble to say it—only to their injury! Christ will come for judgment, not indeed for final judgment, and with fire and cloud, but with a judicial infliction, that "they which see might be made blind." Yes; it may be so. As the gospel is "a savour of life unto life," it is also, says St. Paul, "a savour of death unto death." We thank God we cannot fix on such cases, we thank God that we cannot single out individuals with whom a ministry may be used for so direful a purpose? The bare possibility of there being amongst you one such instance is almost enough to tempt a minister to abandon his office, or discharge it unfaithfully, that he may not be instrumental in heaping woe on a lost spirit; and it is only that merciful arrangement by which God conceals from us the spiritual condition of our fellowmen, conceals it, at least, in such a measure that we are bound to judge nothing till the Lord come, which enables us to carry on our work without tremendous violence to natural feelings. How could I do otherwise than tremble—how be otherwise than almost appalled into silence, if whenever I ascended this pulpit to make a fresh display of the Redeemer, I knew to a certainty that there were men before me with the seared conscience and the iron heart, men so obstinate in their resolve to put from them the offer of eternal life, that I must feel that if the Redeemer himself were to enter our assembly, the Redeemer who died to deliver them, the Redeemer who would have interceded for them, he could only say of them, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind?"

II. But we have said enough to prove to you with reference both to the Jews and to ourselves, that there might be such a decree or determination of God as to vindicate to the letter the words under review. We have given the reasons for believing that with respect to the Jews it actually was ordained, and that with respect to some amongst ourselves it may be ordained, that the gospel of Christ should be nothing but an engine through which is wrought out an aggravated condemnation. And now the question which presses is, whether allowing God to have made such a decree, or passed such a determination, there be anything in the proceeding which is at variance with the known attributes of his nature? We are aware that there is ordinarily a strong repugnance to the opinion that God in any sense or degree predestines man's destruction. It is a repugnance in which we most thoroughly share. We believe that in the largest and most unequivocal sense of the words, God "willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." We could never see how there can be any honesty in the proffers of Scripture—proffers on which no limit is set, but which address themselves equally to every child of man—if all the while there were an eternal immutable decree consigning to everlasting destruction, with no possibility of escape, many of those to whom life is so graciously offered. We have always felt, we have always preached that the doctrine of reprobation, the doctrine which makes God to have decreed that certain men should perish, is opposed to the whole tenor of the Bible, and that it would be impossible on any such principles as those on which the last judgment is said to proceed, to vindicate the condemnation of any of our race, unless it can be shown that they might have been saved, and therefore at the least they were not predestined to perish. Let me say, in passing, that I do not care what your notions on God's election or predestination may be, you have at least no right to bring them into the business and process of man's salvation. This was the view of a man who quite held the doctrine of predestination as it is generally understood; I mean, the late Dr. Chalmers. Last Sunday I was reading the following words in one of his letters:—"While quite assured of the doctrine, I feel quite assured that it leaves all the incitements, and all the obligations, and the whole work of practical Christianity from its commencement to its consummation precisely where it found them. Our business surely is not with the decrees whereof we know nothing, but with the incessant declarations which are sounded in our ears, with the word that is nigh unto us; with God, not in the act of ordaining millions of centuries back, but with God in the act of urgent, honest, and kind entreaty at this very moment. Let us therefore leave the secret things which belong unto God where they ought to be left, and proceed to those revealed things which belong to us and to our children."

And I do not admit that in explaining our text we have assumed or acknowledged any such predestination as to keep back the most timid from not apprehending God's purpose. Have we in our foregoing explanation of how Christ may come for judgment, and inflict judicial blindness—have we supposed God to do what the doctrine of reprobation represents him as doing, that is, appointing and ordaining certain individuals to destruction? We deny it altogether. We have supposed, we have argued, that after long striving with men, after continued and ineffectual efforts to induce them to accept the mercy offered through Christ, God may resolve, as a punishment of their wilful obduracy to prolong, and even increase their spiritual advantages for the very purpose of suffering them to aggravate their own condemnation. This is the sum of what we have advanced; and more than this cannot fairly be deduced from the history of the Jews. The Jews had abused and despised their mercies till they were justly given over to a reprobate mind; and then it was in judgment upon them that they heard the gospel preached by him who "spake as never man spake." It was their punishment, a punishment thoroughly deserved by their desperate depravity, that Jesus came amongst them with all the symbols of Divinity, and by bringing them greater light, made their moral darkness all the more disastrous. But there is nothing here of an unconditional decree appointing the Jews to perish. This is only a decree made after long efforts to reclaim them, and in consequence of their rooted aversion to righteousness—only a decree that they should be left to complete their own destruction through the means assigned for their deliverance. In like manner, if it be true of any in the present day, that henceforwards Jesus comes to them only for judgment, to seal them in blindness, it is not that from the first their perdition had been decreed; it is only that they have grieved and wearied out the Spirit of God, and terminated that day of grace every moment of which salvation lay within their reach. What is there in this which can be pronounced inconsistent with any attribute of the Creator? Will you declare it unjust in God to allow the gospel to become deadly to those who have perverted it against its genuine tendency into the savour of death? What can even better become his majesty and his goodness, than that as "all things work together for good to those that love him," he should so let all things work for the hurt of those that hate him with an invincible hatred, and bear towards him a disaffected and implacable mind? "Understand, therefore, O sinner,"—such is the explanation of an old divine—"understand how much better it is to avoid the stroke of Divine justice than to accuse it." "God will be found true, though every man a liar," that he may be "just when he speaks, and clear when he judgeth."

We have shown you by a careful examination of the case to which our text originally referred, that Christ does not come for judgment to give judicial blindness until we have so withstood the means of grace that vengeance overtakes us as invincibly hardened. If the decree at length go forth against us, our own obstinacy has prepared it, our own wickedness has graven it. There is a period of every man's life during which there is no such decree; there is a period during which Christ comes that the blind may be made to see, and not that they who see may be made blind. It is a period of sufficient length, and presenting sufficient opportunities. In many cases this period may only terminate with life; in others it may be contained within narrower limits; but in all its length is enough, as long as there is hope, yea, possibility of our repentance. If, indeed, we suffer it to elapse, our own destruction may be said to be ordained or appointed by God, though even then we are sorrowed over and bewailed by the Saviour. Witness the burning tears which he wept over Jerusalem, and the thrilling words which brake from him in the midst of his agony. There had been a day during which Jerusalem might have known the things which belonged to her peace; but the day was past; those things were now hid from her eyes, and therefore might it be said that the decree for her destruction had been issued: nevertheless she had herself written the decree. He who could sorrow, though he could not sin, wept over a misery which was self-wrought, and yet could not be averted. Hence the man who perishes is himself the author of the decree which appoints him to perdition. He refuses to rise through Him who is the "resurrection and the life;" he refuses to see through Him who hath "brought life and immortality to light;" and this refusal continued till it would be weakness, and not love, to attempt more for his conversion—this refusal turns the means of deliverance into a means of destruction; so that the proffer of light but brings him darkness. And then we hear of a man's being elected to death, as though he died through God's election! Oh! away with the thought! If destroyed, you must destroy yourself. If chosen to everlasting misery, the choice is altogether, exclusively your own. We wish this impressed on every man who hears us. Shielding yourselves in your sins under the doctrine of election is the vainest of the delusions which Satan has palmed upon the world. It is an idle, yea, it is an impious attempt to make all the blame God's, whilst all the misery is your own. But we will not believe that any one of you has outlived his day of grace. But is not the sun declining? Are not the shadows lengthening? What sand is there left in the hour-glass of life? What sand is there left in the hour-glass of grace? I beseech you as though I were a dying man, whose voice you would never hear again, trifle not with the salvation proposed by the gospel. It may be that some have already trifled till salvation is out of reach. No, no! we said we would not believe this. Anything rather than this. Christ is not yet come for judgment; and therefore we will still beseech you not to trifle with salvation, not to trifle, for however we may believe that it is not yet too late, we dare not doubt that with many there are only weeks, perhaps only hours, perhaps only minutes, still left. Oh! think that possible! only minutes remain for securing immortality; and if these pass by unimproved, there remains the blackness of darkness for ever!

THE TEACHING OF ANGELS BY THE CHURCH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 12, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."—Ephesians iii. 10.

WITH a restless, and for the most part a fruitless curiosity, man searches into the world of spirit, longing to catch some passing notices, which may lay open its structure and its tenantry. Conscious as we are of an intimate and indissoluble connection with the unseen state, we have naturally a great desire to know and realize something of the stirring concerns which are going on around us. We may believe that although to our eyes there be an impalpable veil shrouding the occupations of angel and spirit, yet that no such covering hides us from them, but that, on the contrary, the scene of our present being is looked upon and traversed by multiform ranks of higher intelligence. There are intimations scattered up and down the pages of Scripture, which would lead us necessarily to believe, that keen sympathy with the affairs of this lower creation is felt in the most distant parts of the universe; that the earth on which we dwell serves as a stage, whereon are enacted spectacles that fix the regards of cherubim and seraphim. In one sense we cannot form too mean an opinion of our race; in another we may degrade it below its due station in the rank of being. We are creatures who have fallen away from original innocence, and we possess no inherent capacity to retrieve what sin hath forfeited, and on these accounts we must be described by terms which mark the extremity of wretchedness; but then we are also creatures into whose nature the very Godhead hath entered, and the objects of so vast an interposition can hold none but a dignified place in creation. We cannot be beings of such utter insignificance, as we must otherwise have supposed, seeing that Deity has stooped down on our behalf, and assumed our likeness for the express purpose of raising us to his own. And when, moreover, you read that angels themselves, however glorious and ineffable their nature, are but "ministering spirits sent forth to" wait on "the heirs of salvation," and that so intense is the concern which they feel in the well-being of mankind, that they rejoice with a thrilling gladness over every repentant sinner, we cherish no arrogant pretensions if we hold up our race as occupying an illustrious station in the successive ranks of God's rational creatures. And our text is one of the most remarkable of those intimations, which lead to the belief, that this earth, in place of being detached from other portions of creation, is a scene for the development of God's attributes, and centres on itself the eager regards of the superior orders of spiritual agency. We leave it to the philosopher to use this earth as the home of material for scientific pursuit; we leave it to the poet to admire it as covered with varieties of glorious scenery; here the earth is represented as the school of angels; principalities and powers are described as clustering over its assemblies, that they may learn the wisdom of the Almighty. What a remarkable intimation this! It goes further towards exalting this scene of our pilgrimage than any remembrance of its earliest loveliness. For not when its young beauty was yet unstained, and God held on its surface familiar converse with innocent beings, could the earth be so dignified a spot as now, when all that is holy and mighty in the spiritual world congregates around it for instruction upon lofty themes.

Let us give ourselves, then, to a most interesting inquiry. Here is the earth, which is literally burdened with sin and wickedness, and which we believe reserved for the fires of judgment—here is the earth resorted to by angels, when they wish to learn the attributes of God. Come, and let us consider what is taught us by the remarkable statement—"That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

And we would first observe, the indirect testimony which is given by the text to the superiority of the wisdom manifested in the work of redemption, as compared with the work of creation; for we may well suppose that the material fabric of the universe is subjected to the ken and the scrutiny of angels, in all the grandeur of its magnificent and in all the delicacy of its minuter portions. We may believe that when at the word of the Creator the army of worlds came forth from nothingness, angels looked admiringly on, as globe after globe took place amongst the ranks of the starry host; and ever since we may suppose they have been free to pass through the spreadings of space, to search into all that our Maker has fashioned, measuring the grandeur of his productions, and prying into the nicest contrivances of his creative skill. We think, and in a degree the thought is most just, that we attain to no common perception of the wisdom of the Lord, when we are enabled to lay bare some of the secrets of nature; when we avail ourselves, for example of the optician's art, scanning the heavens, and tracing the harmonious circuits of suns and systems, or when we probe the tiniest atoms, and find whole worlds warring and legislating in their every recess. But if the discoveries within our reach are so sugggestive of the wisdom of the Almighty, would not that wisdom shine forth a thousand fold more conspicuously, if we had an angel's wing on which to soar, and an angel's capacity with which to search; if in place of being limited to one narrow sphere, and confined to the exercise of the most imperfect resources, we had the privilege of passing to and fro through the length and the breadth of the universe, and of reviewing its contents with a gaze which could neither be mastered by what was stupendous, nor perplexed by what was intricate. And, moreover, there is a vast deficiency in all our estimates of the Creator's wisdom, owing to the circumstance, that whilst we may ascertain the properties with which matter is endowed, we can form no idea whatsoever of the causes of those properties. When, for instance, we have decided that the earth attracts, our intellect has done its utmost; it is vain to go into the inquiry why the earth attracts. But if the faculties of an angel were imparted to us, we might penetrate the very secrets of cause, and thus trace through infinite ramifications the workings of a wisdom which we must now measure mainly by its effects. If you combine these and many the like suggestions as to the discovery of God's wisdom which angels must draw from the works of creation, you must at once confess, that there must lie before them an unbounded field of excursion—that they must gather in from every particle of their Creator's material production new and innumerable evidences that the Lord by understanding hath founded the earth and established the heavens. Yet we may conclude from the words of our text, that all God's wisdom in the works of creation is, as it were, cast aside by the angelic company, and they come and sit with the docility of children at the feet of the church, and derive their lessons from the mighty interposition of which she is the subject. Does it not, then, follow in the way of consequence, that redemption must far surpass creation in the lessons which it teaches of the wisdom of God; that in the interference of the Redeemer for the salvation of our fallen race there is the greatest manifestation of that attribute whose name is sometimes used for that of the Eternal Son himself? We are forced to the inference, that when the very mightiest of all created intelligences has passed through the provinces of the Almighty's dominion, surveying in each the countless tribes for whose support there are the devices of infinite skill, exploring, if we may so speak, the joints and wheels of the enormous mechanism of complex systems, this fallen and sin-stained earth will still be referred to as the prime centre of discovery. Stars, ye can be as nothing, though ye are glorious in your marchings; rank upon rank of animated being! wondrous ye may be in your endowments; but ye furnish not sufficient lessons. A redeemed sinner must be the wonder of wonders—if indeed angels return from traversing the circuits of the universe, and congregate upon this lowly globe, and find in the transactions of which it is the scene that pre-eminent teaching which they have elsewhere sought in vain; and that such is the case must be concluded from the statement of our text—"That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

But now let us recur to the main subject of discourse, and endeavour to set before you the great fact, that the Church on earth instructs the angels in heaven with regard to "the manifold wisdom of God." In order to this we should observe, that God's purpose may be as much attained from the spirits which surround his throne, as from ourselves who sojourn in a distant corner of his empire. When Daniel had applied himself by fasting and prayer to understand the mystery of the restoration of his people, the angel Gabriel was commissioned to clear up to him the mystery. Then it is evident the angel was divinely instructed for this special occasion; that of himself he could have known little more than Daniel of God's counsels respecting Jerusalem. And in like manner it may fairly be questioned, whether angels were more conversant than men with God's plan of mercy towards this fallen creation; whether they were not left, like the Jews themselves, to read out from types and figures the scheme of human salvation. Our text seems to require us to suppose cherubim and seraphim bending over the earth, as under the Jewish law their golden emblems bent over the ark, and searching with intense earnestness into the display of the Divine wisdom there presented. The ark of the covenant was an abiding symbol of God's gracious presence with his people, and typified those peculiar benefits which belonged to the covenants of peace mediated by Christ on behalf of the spiritual Israel. The covering of this ark, you will remember, was of massive gold, denominated the mercy-seat. At each end of this mercy-seat was a golden cherubim, placed in such an attitude that it seemed to bend over the ark, as if eagerly desirous to pry into its mysteries; and as if to assure us we are not wrong in thus interpreting the emblem, St. Peter expressly says of the things of redemption, that they are the things which the angels desire to look into. The Greek is still more emphatic than the English—"Things which the angels desire to bend over;" thus making the reference to the cherubim on the mercy-seat both undeniable and explicit. But if angels are represented as bending over the ark—if they are spoken of as desiring to look, rather than as actually looking, surely you may suppose, that previously to the incarnation the mysteries of redemption were no more discovered to them than to men, but that they, as well as the Jews, were required to decipher a vast assemblage of types, and to gather from Divine intimations the splendid appointments of mercy.

If there be justice in this supposition, then our text opens before you with beautiful clearness; for angels must have estimated far better than men the difficulties to be overcome, ere this earth could be restored to the favour of the Lord. They knew from near inspection the uncompromising character of every attribute of God, and perceiving that mercy was yet to be extended to the children of Adam, the problem which must have engaged their attention, whilst they clustered together in shining groups, would naturally be, how God could punish the guilt, and yet pardon the guilty. It would never cross their minds, as it might have done those of less pure and intelligent beings, that the Almighty would dispense with the rigour of justice, or that he would give scope to his yearnings over the fallen by softening the sentence which their fall had provoked. They lived and they moved in the more immediate outgoings of the properties of God; they were privileged to mark the unflinching righteousness of his every procedure; and therefore they well knew, that the universe might be annihilated, rather than one jot or one tittle of God's threatenings against sin fail of most perfect accomplishment. And yet they were conscious of amazing preparations; they beheld victims slain and incense burnt; they saw prophets successively raised up, commissioned by God to utter words of magnificent promise. The whole creation must have appeared to them big with approaching deliverance; so that when they combined the certainty that man was about to be redeemed with the full certainty that none of God's attributes could be compromised, we again say, they must have bent over the mystery with the intensest anxiety, and have proposed to one another time after time in their glorious assemblings the same overpowering question—how God could be just, and yet a justifier of transgressors. And it must have added to the difficulty, that they had seen rebellion enter their own ranks. Beings as blessed and as beloved as themselves had lifted up the hand and the voice against the Omnipotent; but for them there had been no intervention of Deity; for them there had been no remission of punishment; apostate spirits were hurled down, without hope of restoration; and those who maintained their allegiance unbroken might well quote their case, while pondering the circumstances of man's recovery, sorely amazed that there should be mercy for the one race, and not for the other.

Angels, then, as well as ourselves, must have needed a distinct revelation, before they could grapple with God's purposes of grace; and when, therefore, the fulness of time came, and God "sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," we suppose that the season was one of stupendous discovery to the angelic hosts; so that when they crowded the firmament on the birthnight of Jesus, they did not more shout in congratulation of man than in admiration of the scheme laid open to themselves. Let us turn to this scheme. Is it not the mightiest exhibition ever put forth? Here was a province of God's empire, which had thrown off allegiance—a province which he had given to creatures whom he had fashioned after his own image, yet creatures in whose faculties there was no bias to lead them away from unvarying obedience, and on whom he imposed the gentlest trial, as preparatory to admission into still higher enjoyments. And when these creatures, in spite of every advantage thus liberally imparted, yielded at once to the suggestions of evil, there seemed to remain nothing but final and total separation—nothing but that this earth, if still left to trace her orbit, should trace it as a wandering and a baneful star, preaching to other worlds the fearfulness of disobedience. It was not possible that finite wisdom could cope with the problem of restoring the earth without dishonouring its Maker; infinite wisdom mastered the problem; infinite wisdom suggested a plan, which not only made man's rescue consistent with God's honour, but caused it to bring him a vast revenue of glory, and that without exalting one attribute of the Most High at the expense of another. We may believe that to angels, as well as to ourselves, wisdom would appear to have been most called out in the work of redemption; for wisdom was required to undertake the guardianship of every other attribute. She must set herself to the task of preserving justice inviolate, holiness immaculate, truth uncompromised, and yet allowing love to go forth to the rescue of transgressors. Therefore it may be, that Christ is called the wisdom of God, seeing that it was the part of the Eternal Wisdom to provide, that man might be saved whilst the Divine attributes were honoured. This is literally the task which the Mediator undertook, and which be accomplished. But combine the statements which have thus been advanced; the first, that up to the period of the incarnation angels, like men, had only partial glimpses of the scheme of redemption—the second, that God's wisdom is extraordinarily manifested in human salvation; and what conclusion can you reach, but that which is announced in our text? We think that no sooner had the High Priest in the Christian church entered on his earthly sojourning, than the mystery which had for ages been hid in the eternal mind, of which only dim and shadowy notices had been vouchsafed to any finite intelligence—this mystery, we say, broke suddenly forth; a wave of delighted anthem went out from the thousand times ten thousand squadrons; with one accord the countless multitude of spirits swept their harp-strings, and so loud was the minstrelsy and so wide the waving of the chorus, that the shepherds on Bethlehem's plains caught the echo of the one, and the magi in the distant East caught the reverberation of the other. The very syllables of the chaunt which the shepherds heard proved that it was God's wisdom at which the angels became suddenly enraptured. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men," these were the very things which it was difficult to combine. This was the problem on which angelic wisdom had been vainly expended. Glory in heaven and peace on earth—these had appeared always utterly irreconcileable; and now that it was made evident that they could be reconciled, now that God had developed his purpose, and it was found that through this purpose "Mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace embraced each other"—oh! it must have been the display of wisdom which pre-eminently shone forth. It was not the love, for they knew long ago that infinite love had moved God to the planning redemption; it was not the justice, for in their debates they had always calculated on a justice which could never pass by iniquity; it was not the holiness, for it would have been to undeify Deity to suppose him capable of admitting the unclean into communion with himself; but it was the wisdom that amazed them—"the manifold wisdom"—"manifold," for it had reconciled every opposing interest; it had provided for every possible emergency; it had left no point neglected, whether in the attributes of the Creator or the necessities of the creature. This wisdom manifested in the church, whose foundation was just laid upon earth, we believe to have filled with ecstacy the angelic company—yea, to have made such a new epoch in the heavenly annals, that an apostle might be warranted in declaring the gospel to have been published for this very intent—"That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

But enough on the general scheme of redemption: let us turn to its particular and individual application, and see whether we cannot equally find the teaching of angels by the church. If you consult the context you will find, that our text had a primary reference to the calling of the Gentiles, and their admission into privileges which had hitherto been confined to the Jews; and if you contrast the legal and Christian dispensations, you will find a great manifestation of wisdom in that process of extension which made the Gentiles fellow heirs with the Israelites. Jerusalem had been hitherto the metropolis of grace; all the tribes were required to worship in its temple; and thus in the very nature of the Jewish religion there was something opposed to its general diffusion; for to suppose it spread to different parts of the earth, was to suppose the nations placed under a law which from local position they could never have obeyed. But God so constituted his plan of redemption, that the temple was, as it were, taken up from Jerusalem, and erected everywhere. Hitherto the high priest, being nothing more than man, could only officiate in one fixed and definite scene; but our High Priest, God as well as man, is not confined by any limits of space. Wheresoever a human heart throbs with sorrow for sin, there is He standing by to make an atonement. There is thus an extraordinary connection between dispensations apparently most opposite. Wherever there was sin, there must also be sacrifice: this was God's appointment, and the difficulty with which angels had to contend was to maintain the appointment, and at the same time to extend on all sides the family of God; but the appointment was maintained, and nevertheless the family was extended. By the investiture of Christ with priestly authority every spot of earth became instantly a Jerusalem. There was a temple, and there was an altar, where ever man's foot had trod; and the dwellers in distant lands, in place of undertaking perilous journeys to Palestine, were only required to bend the knee in faith and in humility, and suddenly the whole apparatus of atonement rose around them, and they were girded about with the rites of sacrifice. Thus the church, by uniting in her communion Jew and Gentile, made known to angels God's manifold wisdom.

This is not all. Suppose we take the case of the present assembly. We are met together as the Church of the living God, and it is not possible to doubt, that there are angels amongst us. We see them not, we hear them not; but we must get rid of the testimony of St. Paul, who enjoins decorum in the Church "because of the angels," before we can make good a denial that this building now encloses within its walls a number of spiritual beings, just as well as a number of men and of women. The men and the women have come hither to be instructed in the truths of the gospel; the angels have come down from heavenly places to take their lesson as to "the manifold wisdom of God." I speak unto you that are fellow sinners with myself, and I tell you that "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins." I tell you, that the law hath included all under sin, but that the gospel hath included all under redemption; so that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." This is the message which I deliver—a message which is the very summary of the Bible. I press upon you, that no righteousness of your own can avail you—no morality—but that faith, simple faith in the Redeemer, will lift you up, and place you far beyond the reach of death and of hell; and this message must trust for its effect solely and simply to its truth; it does not rely on the oratory, or the pathos, or the logic of the speaker; and when we remember that if any one of you is converted this day, it will be through God's applying to him this simple announcement, 'Thou art a lost sinner, but Christ is a sufficient Saviour,' why, we can but say with the apostle—"It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." And now, if we further think that the message is delivered in the audience of angels—that they are permitted to trace how God carries it into the hearts of those who listen to it, how the Holy Ghost handles, and wields, and applies it—we must be persuaded that this same "foolishness of preaching" is to them a marvellous exhibition of God's manifold wisdom. They must see, in short, as St. Paul strongly expresses it, that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men;" and when they suspect how this simple and apparently foolish message fits, so to speak, into the heart—how nicely it is adapted to undermine what is proud, to soften what is hard, to strengthen what is wavering, to comfort what is sorrowful, we do say that they must gather an amazing lesson from this our assembly, and that nothing can be truer than "that now at this very moment is "known unto principalities and powers by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

And still further. This teaching of angels may not require that any sinner should be actually converted. The whole of the worship may draw to a close, and no visible effects follow the delivery of the message of reconciliation; nevertheless, God's wisdom may have largely manifested itself, and angels may have profited, whilst men have been indifferent. You are distinctly assured, that God's word shall not return unto him void. When he saith to you by my voice, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help," we know undeniably that the announcement shall not die in the air, but that in one way or another it will work out its intended effect. And just observe how there may be a spectacle of wisdom spread before angels, even when to us "the foolishness of preaching" seems wholly ineffective. The seed will often lie for a long while dormant; years may elapse, before it springs up and shoots. Can we not believe, that there is a surprising exercise of wisdom in hiding the message in the soul, in so placing it that a long train of circumstances shall at last call it up from its concealment, and cause the forgotten words to speak thrillingly, and persuasively, and resistlessly? And if the angels are allowed to contemplate the operations of the Holy Ghost upon the heart, then when they see the message which I now deliver, placed as it were, on the wheels of a most complex mechanism, laid at the extremity of a huge combination of causes, all working out in one way or another its final and overwhelming application, I do say, they stand peculiarly in the attitude of spectators of the wisdom of the Lord; so that verily now by the Church is known unto those principalities "the manifold wisdom of God."

We know, indeed, little of the operations of spirit upon spirit, and we are not competent to decide how far the workings of our minds may lie open to the inspection of angels; it is the province of God alone to search the heart and to read the thought; and therefore we do not suppose that any created intelligence, however exalted, has privilege to enter at pleasure the chambers of man's soul, or to scrutinize what goes on in the busy workshop of the brain; but we do not ascribe to angels any faculty inconsistent with their nature, when we suppose that God may often throw open before them the human soul, and lay bare its inmost recesses. For if man can discover his thoughts to man, through the medium of speech, spirit may develope them to spirit, through the channel of actual inspection. And this is all that we have supposed, in supposing angels cognizant of God's wisdom, in so depositing the seed of the word in the human soul that it shall lie there inactive for year after year, and then, through the combined agency of a long and intricate series of causes, start into life, and bring forth the fruits of conversion and of righteousness. This is all, moreover, which we shall suppose, in the last remaining illustration which we have to give of the text. If the gospel be not "a savour of life unto life," it must be "a savour of death unto death." These our assemblings, if they issue not in your conversion, turn into witnesses for the day of judgment, and shall help to regulate the verdict of the last assize. And do ye not think, that if we were allowed to discover how sermons and sacraments which seem to us to perish in the using are made to tell on the arrangements of final trial—if we could detect and scan the thousand curious fibres which associate each hour of our worship with the dread season of our standing before the tribunal of Christ, so that every word I now utter gives a vibration to the air, which dies not away till it is quelled by the sounds of doomsday,—do ye not, I say, think that we should behold a development of wisdom which should overpower by its immenseness? And if this be the development on which angels gaze, once more we affirm, that by the Church is made known unto them the manifold wisdom of God. Think how the Bible adapts itself to every possible case—a precept against every sin, a promise for every disquietude, a balm for every wound! Think, moreover, on the variety of God's dealings with his people, all so admirably contrived that they invariably "work together for good;" think on the progressive unfoldings of prophecy, each wondrously adapted to strengthen the faith and to direct the steps of believers; think on the risings and fallings of empires, as all directly subserving the interests of Christianity; yes, think on these and many the like ample topics, and who can deny, that the Church may be called a fine study for angels? Who shall marvel at a description which represents principalities and powers gathering about this Church, watching her assemblies, tracing her movements, and learning from the multiform transactions which pass amongst her members the manifold wisdom of the Lord God Almighty?

One word more. There are angels amongst us; they have marked our worship; they give heed to the effect of the preached word; and now are they just ready to spring from the earth, to hasten back to the immediate presence of God. Whilst their wings are yet folded, whilst they are still intent on searching out God's wisdom, as made known by the Church, shall not some one individual yield himself a subject to Christ, and surrender his heart as a new trophy of redeeming love? Oh! there are no tears in heaven; but when angels come down to earth, it may be, they can fall into companionship with human sadness, and even learn to weep; and where is the spectacle which shall wring tears from eyes which they were never meant to stain, if it be not that of the obstinate rejection of the gospel of reconciliation, and of careless trifling with a thing so inestimably precious as the soul? Old men, busied with your gold! angels weep over you. Young men, frittering away your days in vanities and pleasures! angels weep over you. Listen, whilst we show you one peculiarity in the text. It speaks of "the principalities and powers in heavenly places." Devils, as well as angels, are called in Scripture "principalities and powers;" but "the manifold wisdom of God" is known only to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places." The others discern it not, estimate it not. But if ye will not turn at the bidding of the Lord, then it is but too true, that "unto the principalities and powers" not "in heavenly places" will be known by this Church the desperate obstinacy of man. They will know it, and they will rejoice at it. But the Lord God Almighty can yet prevent this triumph; his wisdom is "manifold;" he can put forth a new device, he can exert a new engine; and we do trust, that even at this very instant such a process is going on in the hearts of some of those who hear, that the attendant angels are exulting in the display of their Maker's wisdom. They see—oh! that it may be so!—the Word already working; and they hasten to climb the starry battlements, and wake a chorus of praise from their glorious conclaves. The Lord grant in his own good time, that we may all heighten this blessed minstrelsy, and all join in the new song, "the song of Moses and of the Lamb!"

THE WIT AND THE MADMAN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 19, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?"—Ecclesiastes ii. 2.

IT is curious to consider how many persons, notwithstanding the aboundings of sickness and death, know them only by report, and have never been brought actually into contact with these great consequences of sin. It is not unlikely, for instance, that there are some amongst you who have never seen a dead body, and many more with whom the sight has been singularly rare, occurring only at far intervals, when they have been called to endure great domestic bereavement. Indeed, unless a man's profession bring him, so to speak, into companionship with death, he may live for many years with a thousand falling at his side, and ten thousand at his right hand, and yet know nothing but by rumour of the stillness, and coldness, and ghastliness of death. He may have practically no acquaintance with the fixed pale lineaments of a corpse; and if there were placed before him the coffin which had just received its motionless tenant, he might experience something of that strange thrill and sickness which may be called nature's involuntary confession of the fearfulness of the original curse. And hence it would be supposed to be greatly for the advantage of numbers, if, without exposing them to the danger of growing too familiar with death, we could make them so far acquainted with what it is to die, as to leave them without excuse, if they persisted in deferring to give heed to the salvation of the soul. There are many, especially amongst the young, for whom it would, we think, be a most excellent thing, if they could occasionally accompany the physician or the clergyman in his rounds, and be introduced to one sufferer after another, presenting all the varieties and stages of disease. An occasional walk through the wards of a hospital would be instrumental, we believe, to the leading numbers of you into the narrow path of life; for whether the patient manifested the wildness of fever, or the exhaustion of consumption, or the anguish of some deep-seated pain, the same lesson would be mercifully delivered—the lesson that whilst "the earthly house of this tabernacle" is being taken down, there is the least possible ability of labouring after an entrance into the heavenly inheritance. But now suppose, that in place of conducting you through a hospital for the sick, we were to take you round an asylum for the mad. There is no disease which can for a moment be compared with that which, having in some sense its seat in the brain, quenches or dims the light of reason, so that man is brought down to the level of the brute. It is commonly felt and said, that death is preferable to madness; and certainly, if it were not that the lunatic may possibly recover, and be restored to society and friendship, no one perhaps could dissent from the decision, that it would be easier to lay one we loved in the grave, than to see in him the wild eye, and hear from him the wild chatter of the maniac. And accordingly there is nothing from which we seem more instinctively to shrink than from madness, though it be only one of those many fell maladies to which flesh is heir. We can scarcely be said to have sympathy with the mad as we have with the sick. However assured we may be, as to madness being nothing but one description of sickness, it does not come home to us in any the like manner, that we are exposed to the same malady, or in danger of being similarly diseased. The mind will possibly admit the probability that the body may have to suffer from the diseases which the hospital presents; but it seems to know nothing whatever of the probability that itself may be out of joint. This enters not, to all appearance, into its list of contingencies; as though the soul, with her innate feeling of deathlessness, shrank from even the suspension of her faculties, as from an image of annihilation, that she felt it would be treason to herself to contemplate as a reality. It is this, as we think, which gives its fearfulness to the madhouse, when we visit it for the purpose of a passing inspection. There is a sort of unearthliness about the scene. It is not man who is looked upon, for reason is felt to be indispensable to the constitution of man; it is a strange, mysterious, inexplicable being, who seems to have assumed the human form that he may appal us in our own likeness, and to have come from some dark place of final retribution on an errand of scorn and revenge. We do not know whether there be not something analogous between the feelings with which the inmate of a madhouse is surveyed, and those which might be supposed to be excited by the appearance of a spectre. In either case it is the want of earthliness which goes so chillingly to the heart. It is not one of ourselves, with all the attributes of humanity, which is standing before us; and that involuntary shudder is in both instances a confession that we are in contact with something which is not of this creation, and that from all such contact flesh and blood must shrink. But let the causes be what they may, the fact is beyond dispute, that madness is regarded by us with feelings wholly different from those which are excited by any other form of sickness, and that we are conscious of emotions, as we look upon the maniac, whether his be the tempestuous or the melancholy mood, which are never called forth by sufferings which leave the reason untouched. We cannot bring you away from the madhouse, as from the hospital, with all the gentler sensibilities called into play, so that you scarce can refrain from weeping, so touching have you found the spectacle of human affliction, and so full of gloomy warning to yourselves; you will almost hurry from the receptacle of the insane as though your path had been crossed by boding and ministering forms; and it will perhaps be long before you cease to be haunted by the recollections of your visit; but they will be recollections that make the blood creep, rather than the heart melt; and in the stillness of night you will be startled as by the wild voice which had pealed from the solitary cell, or glared on by that eye which had seemed to you all fire, and nevertheless all darkness.

We should like to take you, when such recollections were in their strength, and address you on our present subject of discourse. If we were about to handle a passage of Scripture which treated of moral sickness and death, likening men in an unconverted state to those who were worn down by disease or bound up for burial, we might wish to take you, as we should, from the hospital, with your eyes full of emaciated forms and all the helplessness of dissolution. It might well be expected that you would be disposed to listen with attention to descriptions which transferred to yourselves the images which crowded within your recollection; and we might hope that, being painfully affected by what you had just seen, you would not be indifferent, as a similar though far worse condition were proved to be spiritually your own. And upon the same principle we wish you to have all your horror of madness in exercise, as we discourse to you on a verse which may perhaps find its explanation among yourselves; for it is a case of madness which we have to survey; and it should therefore be under the impression of all which a Bedlam can do to make you cower and shrink, that we come to the consideration of this saying of Solomon—"I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?"

Now, he said this of laughter. He said, therefore—for this is virtually the same thing—of the mirthful man, of the man who makes others laugh, that he is a madman. This is the assertion which we shall have to examine. Perhaps it surprises you. If you were asked who had sat for the portrait of a madman, you would be disposed to look out for some monster, some scourge of our race, in whom vast powers had been at the disposal of ungoverned passions, and who had covered a country with weeping and with desolate families; and at first we might be readily tempted to conclude that Solomon employed somewhat exaggerated terms, when he identified laughter with madness. Neither need we suppose that all laughter is indiscriminately condemned; as though gloom marked a sane person, and cheerfulness an insane. "Rejoice evermore" is a Scriptural direction, and blithe-heartedness ought to be both felt and displayed by those who know that they have God for their Guardian, and Christ for their Surety. But it is the laughter of the world which the wise man calls madness; and there will be no difficulty in showing you, in two or three instances, how close is the parallel between the maniac and the man by whom this laughter is excited.

And in order to this we would first point out to you, how that conflict of which this creation is the scene, and the leading antagonists in which are Satan and God, is a conflict between falsehood and truth. The entrance of evil was effected through a lie; and when Christ promised the descent of the Holy Ghost, whose special office it was to be to regenerate human kind, to restore their lost purity, and therewith their lost happiness, he promised it under the character of a Spirit of truth; as though truth were all that was needed to the making this earth once more a paradise. And it is in accordance with this representation of that great struggle which fixes the regards of higher orders of intelligence, as being a struggle between falsehood and truth, that so much criminality is everywhere in Scripture attached to a lie, and that those on whom a lie may be charged, are represented as thereby more especially obnoxious to the anger of God. "A lying tongue," says the wise man, "is but for a moment;" as though sudden vengeance might be expected to descend upon the liar, and sweep him away ere he could reiterate the falsehood. And if there be thus, as it were, a kind of awful majesty in truth, so that the swerving from it is emphatically treason against God and the soul, it follows that whatever is calculated to diminish reverence for truth, or to palliate falsehood, is likely to work as wide mischief as may well be imagined. You are all ready without hesitation to admit, that nothing would go further towards loosening the bonds of society than the destroying the shame which now attaches to a lie; and accordingly you would rise up as by one common impulse to withstand any man or any authority which should propose to shield the liar, or to make his offence comparatively unimportant. There must be no endeavour to do away with the contempt which is the portion of every one detected in a falsehood; for it is a safeguard, as you all feel, against an almost universal suspicion and distrust, which must overspread and darken the world in which truth was a stranger. But whilst the bold and direct falsehood thus gains for itself the general execration, mainly perhaps because felt to militate against the general interest, there is a ready indulgence in the more sportive falsehood, which is rather the playing with truth than the making a lie. Here it is that we shall find laughter which is madness, and identify with a madman him by whom the laughter is raised. There is very frequently a departure from truth in that mirthful discourse to which Solomon refers. You know how much will be pardoned in an erroneous statement for the sake of its wit, and how the reciter of an amusing tale, though perhaps a fiction of his own, or founded on truth, yet exaggerated in all its parts, to make it more effective, will be applauded by the company who constitute his audience, though all the while they may be suspicious, if not absolutely certain, that he is not adhering to facts. Just because his only intention is to excite laughter, he is not merely tolerated but admired in a lie; and if any one were to receive him with a frown, and to show that he thought seriously of the trifling with truth, he might look to be regarded as an over-rigid Puritan, who could not distinguish between the wicked imposition and the innocent jest. But we should like to know whether truth be a thing which can be either innocently or harmlessly trifled with; whether, rather, it be not of that delicate texture that it is injured by the being breathed upon, just as much as through rude and violent handling; whether by so coarse and strong a saying as that of our text—a saying which must especially prove the truth of the statement under consideration—we should not regard as utterly mischievous that tampering with truth for which the wit of the speaker is commonly received as more than an excuse. There is many a young mind which loses its horror of a lie, through observing the applause which follows an exaggeration or clever misrepresentation; and many a child, it may be, however well schooled on set occasions in the importance of adhering to the truth, marks shrewdly how an instructor indulges in falsehood when he finds it to be amusing, and declaims against it with solemnity when he strives to be personal. They who would recommend truth need be as truthful when relating the events of a morning walk as when giving the story of creation, or enlarging on the nature of God; they must no more indulge in falsehood to make a tale more amusing, than to increase their estate or amplify their profits. In amusing a table, and causing light-heartedness and gaiety to go round the company, men may be teaching others to view with less abhorrence a lie, or diminishing in them that sanctity of truth which is at once an admirable virtue and essential to the existence of any other. I do not fear the influence of one whom the world denounces as a liar; but I do of one whom it applauds as a wit. I fear it in regard of reverence for truth—a reverence which, if it do not of itself make a great character, must be strong wheresoever the character is great. I fear that in much of those pleasantries which throw so cheerful an air over a party—in those keen and humourous descriptions of men and events, which cannot be heard without laughter, but which would lose all their attractiveness if stripped of their exaggeration—there is to be found a predominating cause of the want of a high and unflinching veracity in many, whose education should have been a pledge for their truthfulness. I can hardly have a reverence for that with which I accustom myself to play, neither can I allow that to be sacred with which another whom I respect and admire habitually trifles. Thus much we may certainly argue—that whoever helps to make others less truthful, works a mischief whose extent we can scarcely exaggerate. It is not the tyrant who should come upon a land with fire and sword that would inflict the most fearful injury, if you compare him with a man who should make the people all liars. In the universal distrust, in the universal dislocation of the bonds of society, which must follow on the banishment of truth, there would be elements for a confusion and a wretchedness, which scarcely any amount of hostile aggression would be likely to produce. Imagine a world without truth, trace the features which this general outline includes, and you have as wild a chaos as fancy ever drew, as vast a desolation as could possibly be imagined. Indeed a world without truth is a world without Christ, seeing that "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;" and though there may seem no proportion between such a state as a result, and a sportive exaggeration as a cause, nevertheless, if there be that tendency we have traced in the sportive exaggeration to the diminishing the reverence for truth, the author may be regarded as doing his part in bringing round such a condition. If the falsehood, though uttered but in joke, make falsehood less hateful to those who sit around, he who delivers it may justly be charged as instrumental in spreading the misery to which lying gives rise. And it is, therefore, but a just representation which Solomon furnishes in our text, even if you apply it to what the world reckons venial, or rather what it covers with approval. The man who passes off a clever fiction, or amusingly distorts an occurrence, or dextrously misrepresents a fact, may say that he only means to be amusing, and that nothing is further from his thoughts than the doing any injury; but nevertheless, forasmuch as it can hardly fail but that he will lower the majesty of truth in the eyes of his neighbour, there may be equally ample reason for assenting to the wise man's decision—"I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?"

But we do not think that we have yet given the worst case of that laughter which may be identified with madness. It is very true that whatever tends to diminish men's abhorrence of a lie, tends equally to the spreading confusion and wretchedness, and may therefore be justly classed amongst things which resemble the actings of a maniac. It is also true, that this tendency exists in much of that admired conversation whose excellence virtually lies in its falseness; so that the correspondence is clear between the wit and the madman. But it is not perhaps till the laughter is turned upon sacred things that we have before us the madness in all its wildness and in all its injuriousness. There are different ways in which infidelity may be propagated, or men's belief in revelation weakened or undermined. There is, for example, such a being as the open apostle of infidelity, though, if we knew not the fact, we might have questioned the possibility. We might have doubted whether the being could be found who, whatever his own persuasion as to the falseness of Christianity, would go about amongst his fellows, endeavouring to bring them to the same opinion with himself; for it has been a thousand times said, and never refuted, that Christianity, even if it be all fable and all delusion, is not only harmless, but immeasurably beneficial, effecting more good for society and diffusing more of security and happiness than any system which the world has yet known, or any which could be devised to succeed in its place. False it may be, but no truth has been discovered which can for a moment be compared with it in advancing the present interests of mankind, nay, nothing which can be compared with it in advancing the future; for nothing has ever proved so powerful as Christianity in persuading men to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world," and such a life must, on every theory, be most acceptable to the Deity, and most likely to secure happiness in another state of being. It is evident, therefore, that in every sense a worse injury could not be inflicted on the world than by depriving it of Christianity, or proving to it that the Christian religion is altogether a fable; and he who can go about on the business of propagating infidelity, deserves to be dealt with as a public nuisance; he is nothing better, and should find no better treatment than the man who would take pains to disseminate the plague; and if society would rise up with one cry of indignation against the monster who should strive to infect all its families, it should do no less in regard of the teacher of scepticism, who aims a blow at the general happiness. But there are other ways of propagating infidelity, besides those of open apostleship. There is many an individual who, without distinctly intending to attack revealed religion, for if asked would declare himself a believer therein, is instrumental by jocular conversation upon sacred things, by witticisms and pleasantries with regard to Divine truths, to the making men think lightly of the Bible, and so to the preparing them to despise its authority. The man who in any way exercises his wit upon the Bible conveys undoubtedly an impression, whether he intend it or not, that he is not a believer in the inspiration of the Bible, for it is altogether insupposable that a man who really recognized in the Bible the Word of the living God, who felt that its pages had been traced by the very hand which spread out the firmament, should select from it passages to parody, or expressions which might be thrown into a ludicrous form. It may be true that he does this only in joke, and with no evil design; he never meant, he may tell you, when he introduced Scripture ridiculously, or amused his companions by sarcastic allusions to the peculiarities of the pious—he never meant to recommend a contempt for religion, or to insinuate a disbelief in the Bible, and perhaps he never did; but nevertheless, even if you acquit him of harmful intention, and suppose him utterly unconscious that he is working a moral injury, he who forms jokes on sacred things, or points his wit with scriptural allusions, may do far more mischief to the souls of his fellow men than if he engaged openly in assaulting the great truths of Christianity. The case is the same as with the sportive lie, which is far more likely through its playfulness to weaken men's reverence for truth, than the bold unblushing falsehood, which has only to be discovered to be abhorred. And it is extraordinary what power there is in some ludicrous exhibition of sacred things to destroy the solemnity with which those things should be approached and regarded. If you have heard a text quoted in a ridiculous sense, or applied to some laughable occurrence, you will hardly be able to separate the text from that occurrence; the association will be permanent; and when you hear the text again, though it may be in the house of God, or under circumstances which make you wish for the most thorough concentration of thought on the most awful things, yet will there come back upon you all the joke and all the parody, so that the mind will be dissipated and the very sanctuary profaned. And hence the justice of identifying with madness the laughter excited by reference to sacred things. The man, as we have already said, who makes the reference, may only mean to amuse the company, and he meditates no attack upon religion; but he suffers himself to become profane in labouring to become witty; and perhaps, for this is very common, he mistakes profaneness for wit, and supposes that he is clever because he is reckless. He cannot withstand the temptation of making a ridiculous allusion to Scripture, or of taking off, as it is termed, the manners and habits of the devout, and he has his reward; a peal of laughter, which is excited by his absurd application of a text, or by his keen caricature and burlesque, repays him, if he ever had any scruples, and encourages him if he have fewer for the future. But he may have wrought unquestionable mischief; he may have deceived them into a persuasion that the Bible does not deserve all their reverence, and that a profession of religion is the same thing with hypocrisy; he may have conveyed the impression that the Bible may be fairly used as a jest book, and that he who would not be ridiculous must not be religious; and he could not have done worse. Could he have armed himself with eloquence and learning, and set himself to give many and ingenious reasons for repudiating Scripture, and living without a thought of the Moral Governor of the Universe, could he have done anything more likely to induce his hearers to think scornfully of revelation and slightingly of godliness? In the one case, indeed, he could not have been in sport, and he may have been in the other; but what of this? I dread not the sound argument half so much as the satirical allusion. The mind braces itself up against the former, but opens all its avenues without fear to the latter. In sport, indeed! If there be any excuse in this for the rashness of the speaker, there is no diminution in the risk to the hearer. And what excuse is it to the speaker? As well tell me of the sportiveness of the man who carries the lighted torch into the magazine of gunpowder! As well tell me of the sportiveness of the man who takes away the linch-pin from the loaded caravan, or unhinges the rudder of the labouring ship. No, no; it is at best the sport of the idiot, and may produce the same mischief as the playfulness of the maniac. We might illustrate this in various ways. Take, for instance, parodies on the Liturgies of the church, which have been often attempted, but always held up as deserving the public execration. I really do not know what is more likely to undermine the religion of a country than ingenious parodies of the Liturgy forced into general circulation, so that they might become familiar so all classes and all ages. The man who has heard or read a clever parody on one of our public prayers will hardly ever be able to join in the prayer without remembering the parody; so that there will be an end to devotion, just perhaps when he is beginning to gather his thoughts up into communion with God; and you have only to suppose the parody extended to every part of the Liturgy, and you may suppose that instead of our public worship being an act of reverence and solemnity, it would be at best a struggle with base and low images—not so much the offering a sacrifice, as the endeavouring with Abraham to drive away the birds which come down to eat it. Make such a state general, and what could the apostle of infidelity wish better? Through what instrumentality could he be more likely to make way for his own pestilential creed? And this is but an illustration of a power of which we think you must all be conscious—the power which there is in a joke upon sacred things of adhering to those who hear it, and always recurring when the same things are mentioned. The sermon is present, but the parody cannot be got rid of; it seems graven upon brass; and the memory, which is but as a sieve if you pour in texts of Scripture in their pure and solemn form, becomes exceedingly retentive, if you only give those texts a ridiculous turn. Hence we again see the justice of defining as a madman playing with edged tools the jocular companion, jesting on sacred themes; and if ever you hear one of our men of wit and of fashion entertaining a company with sarcasms on the religious, or with the ridiculous use of scriptural expressions, let it seem nothing to you that his deceit is but pleasantry, and that he has no set design of cheating men into infidelity. Remember only the power of satire, the might of a laugh, the momentum of a jest; and then, as you think how many this fascinating companion may seduce into irreverence, and encourage in impiety, we feel that you do him no injustice in applying to the merriment which he may excite the words of Solomon in the text—"I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?"

Now, the upshot of the whole matter, or the great general inference which we have to draw from our subject of discourse is, that we ought to set a watch upon our tongues, to pray God to keep the door of our lips. It is very strongly, but most truly said by Solomon in the Book of Proverbs, that "death and life are in the power of the tongue." Of all the gifts with which we have been entrusted, the gift of speech is perhaps that through which we may work most of evil or of good, and nevertheless it is that of whose right exercise we seem to make least account. It appears to us a hard saying, that for every idle word which they speak men shall give an account at the last, and we scarcely discern any proportion between a few syllables uttered without thought and those retributive judgments which must be looked for hereafter; but if you observe how we have been able to vindicate the correctness of the assertion of our text, though it be only the idle talker whose laughter is declared to be madness, effecting the same results, and producing the same evils as the fury of the uncontrolled maniac, you will see that a word may be no insignificant thing—that its consequences may be widely disastrous, and certainly the speaker is answerable for the consequences which may possibly ensue, however God may prevent their actual occurrence. The fiction may not make a liar, and the jest may not make an infidel; but since it is the tendency of the fiction to make liars, and the tendency of the jest to make infidels, he who invents the one, or utters the other, is as criminal as though the result had been the same as the tendency. There is perhaps nothing over which Christianity has so little influence as over the ordinary conversation of Christians. They who in the main give heed to other precepts, seem quite to forget this of the apostle—"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt." The apostle does not mean the salt of wit, which may make speech sparkling, but the salt of religion, which will make speech wholesome. Not that the conversation is always to be, so to speak, on religious topics; but it would be well that it should always have a religious tone. And this simple rule, whilst admitting within our social circle whatever is instructive, yea, whatever is entertaining without being contaminating, excludes only the malicious slander, the idle jest, and the unprofitable badinage, which, if they serve to kill time, may show themselves double-edged, and kill the soul with the same stroke. And if anything can make us henceforwards watchful over our tongues and desires, to use what David calls the best member which we have to the glory of God and the good of our fellow-men, it will be the representation which we have had under review, and which identifies with the madman, scattering destruction on all sides, the jocular talker, in whose jokes is deceit. We wished at the outset of our discourse, that we could take you when fresh from a visit to a madhouse, in order that whilst the terrors of lunacy were yet haunting your minds, you might search with us for a madman who was said to be at large amongst ourselves. We spoke to you of a great difference between the feelings excited in us by beholding the sick and those excited in us by beholding the mad. It would almost seem, that whilst healthy persons feel themselves on the same ground with the sick, there was an impassable gulph between the sane and the insane ; for the feelings of men in contemplating those in whom reason is extinguished are almost what they might be expected to be, if they were admitted to the view of a different order of beings—if there were laid open the invisible worlds, and they gazed on sufferers who had no companionship with themselves. There is no drawing, so to speak, of the sane man towards the madman, as there is of the healthy man towards the sick ; but on the contrary, there is an instinctive repugnance, and that too, if it be analyzed, because there is a feeling as though the links of association were all shattered between ourselves and the insane, as though it were the destruction of manhood, and a being ceased to be our fellow-creature in ceasing to be rational, and went off to some perturbed and lawless community. And therefore were we anxious to take you, when all your feelings at the sight of madness were working in your soul, hoping that if we succeeded in finding who those are whose laughter may be identified with madness, we should be all the more sure of your being eager to avoid them and to shun their companionship. But now we are hardly confident that such a result will follow. We have indeed ascertained whence this laughter comes of which it is declared, that it is mad—the madness which, as Solomon states in another place, "scattereth firebrands, arrows, and death." But now our fear is, that because the firebrands may be blazing with wit, and the arrows be feathered with genius, you will not shrink from the destroyer, or will not believe that he can indeed scatter death. Therefore must we press upon you, in conclusion, that the wandering maniac would be only but vastly more formidable, if there were fascination in his eye, in place of terror in his look, so that he could keep you enchanted, whilst he planted the firebrand under your dwelling, or directed the arrow to your heart. It is not the speech that shocks modesty, that is likely to encourage licentiousness, but that which is just refined enough not to cause a blush. It is not the coarse sneer which will frighten the young from religion, but the polished satire which will make them ashamed of being pious. The coarse assault would put them on their guard, but the dexterous insinuation will conquer by disarming. Then be ye careful that ye never, whether in others or yourselves, let cleverness apologise for levity, wit screen profaneness, nor ingenuity recommend falsehood ; for be ye well assured, that when the final inquiry shall go on as to causes and agencies through which souls have been destroyed, it will not be the blasphemer, whose tongue was laden with oaths, nor the profligate, whose speech was all ribaldry, nor the infidel who scurrilized religion, that will be necessarily fixed on as having done the most mischief : the elegant and amusing talker, the accomplished trifler with the truth, the polished jester, who meant no harm—this may be the man of whom it will be emphatically proved, that his laughter was mad, and that his mirth wrought death.

THE VISION OF THE FIRST MARTYR.

A Sermon

Delivered on Tuesday Morning, February 26, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."—Acts vii. 59, 60.

It not unfrequently happens, that the righteous, when they come to die, speak as if they had glimpses of the heavenly world and had already caught the notes of its exulting songs; and often the bystanders ascribe such sayings to the wandering of a mind enfeebled by disease, as though there could be nothing real in what the departing man asserts, but that the whole should be resolved into the delusions of an over-wrought brain. Yet why may it not be, that as the soul is hovering between this world and the next, just pluming its wing for celestial flight, God may cheer it with the appearance of things within the veil, and grant it such bright and inspiring prospects of the everlasting inheritance, as may animate it the more to break away from this tabernacle of flesh? There can be nothing which partakes of the dream of enthusiasm in supposing that as the bands are being loosened which attach the soul to earth, she is, in a measure, permitted to assert her independence of material organs, and with her powers—those powers with which she will have to gather in knowledge whilst the body remains in the grave—to look on things which altogether elude the eye of the flesh. The dying man will sometimes speak as if he saw angelic forms—as if bright creatures, too bright to belong to this vale of tears, were waiting in visible array to be his guides as he springs into eternity. Must this be all delusion? Must it be the mere working of disease, the picturing of delirium, when the heavenly hosts are thus supposed to be not only actually—for who doubts that? who doubts the actual presence in so solemn, so awful a moment, of beings who are expressly declared to be "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation?"—must it be the mere picturing of delirium, when these beings are supposed not only to be actually, but visibly present, so that they cheer or sustain the sufferer by their radiant smiles—smiles such as never gleamed on human countenance since sin gave cause for a blush? Indeed, I know not why we should presume to say so. I always read with intense interest what is recorded of our Blessed Saviour in his agony: "There appeared an angel from heaven strengthening him." The angel might not have been visible to others, but the Redeemer beheld the beautiful form of the celestial visitant, and was comforted and upheld in his mysterious struggle by the presence of one of the heavenly host. Why may not something similar occur in regard to the dying believer? I cannot but feel as though it were a point of correspondence or association between Christ and his people that the last earthly hours of both should be hours for the special manifestation of the inhabitants of the invisible world. Make it a matter of certainty that the dying Christian is often permitted to gaze on bright angels waiting to receive his parting spirit, and I shall be only the more impressed with the truth of Christ's having in all things been "made like unto his brethren;" seeing that unto him also "there appeared an angel from heaven strengthening him." I will not resolve into the mere wanderings of an unsettled mind those visitations from the heavenly world with which dying believers profess themselves cheered, whilst I know that "the High Priest of our profession," was himself thus supported in his hours of struggle. Rather would I believe and rejoice in believing, that the angelic hosts may keep visible guard in the sick man's room—visible, not indeed to the dull-eyed attendants who have yet no sight but for material things, but visible to him who is placed on the confines of the unknown world, and for whom the everlasting doors are being lifted up that he may pass in triumphantly, and see face to face. Rather would, I believe, and rejoice in believing, that it is not necessarily, nor even commonly, a dark and lonely journey through "the valley of the shadow of death." "The hour cometh," said the blessed Redeemer to his disciples, "yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." "The hour cometh, yea is now come," may the departing Christian say to his sorrowing kinsmen, "when ye must be separated from me and leave me alone; and yet I am not alone: ye cannot indeed bear me company in this awful passage; ye have walked with me in life; ye must forsake me in death; yet I am not alone; the Good Shepherd is at my side, and his rod and his staff, they comfort me: bright forms are beckoning me onward; glimpses of a glorious land are breaking through the light; and the voices around me whisper consolation." My brethren, this may be, we believe it often is, the dying Christian's experience. One cannot mark the more than earthly blessedness which sits frequently on the wan and wasted features, the smile of light which comes and goes like the reflection of some shooting star, the look of intercourse when there is no sound to be heard, the gaze of ardent scrutiny when there is no form to be seen—one cannot mark all this without concluding that the departing believer has privileges and consolations which are not to be apprehended by any but himself; and that though he may not be able to tell his experience~~, or though when he tell it, it may seem but the picturing of an imagination no longer under wholesome control,~~ the objects and beings of another world are brought actually before him. ~~Let~~ Such thoughts cheer us as we anticipate our own passage into the invisible world. Death, ~~my brethren,~~ has its own special helps and assuagements. "When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Many who on scriptural grounds entertain the hope of entering into everlasting life, yet shrink from dissolution as from something inexpressibly terrible, feeling that if they had "the wings of a dove" they might gladly "fly away and be at rest," but fearing the unknown anguish of the process of the taking down the "earthly house of this tabernacle." Away with all such fears! I cannot, indeed, tell you what the extraordinary supports are which God grants to the believer in his hour of departure; but I have seen enough of dying Christians to be thoroughly assured, that, under no circumstances, are the words of Scripture more literally verified, "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be." Attend to your lives then, and God will be mindful of your deaths. There may be unknown terrors in death, but there are also unknown consolations. God makes all the beds of his servants in sickness. It is Christ himself who is said to have the keys of death and the invisible world. When Lazarus died he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, so that heavenly ministers must have been abiding round the beggar as the soul struggled to be free. Dismiss, then, all anxiety as to the process of death, and concentrate all your carefulness on

these
may well

the duties of life; for if we cannot promise you, after fighting the good fight of faith, such glorious things within the veil as cheered the first martyr, Stephen, we can give you the assurance as attested by the uniform experience of the church, that God will visit you in your dying moments in such a manner as to deprive death altogether of its sting, as to soothe you, sustain you, and animate you with visions of the inheritance of the saints in light: to be able with Stephen to commend your soul to the Redeemer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,"—with Stephen, to breathe a prayer, not only for friends, but even for enemies, "Lay not this sin to their charge;" and then bystanders shall have meekly to record: "And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Now what were the manifestations vouchsafed to Stephen, and which so wondrously sustained him through the bitterness of martyrdom? You find these recorded in the preceding part of the chapter: "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." We may not pretend to explain what Stephen saw in seeing the glory of God. We can only suppose that, as with St. Paul caught up to the third heaven, it was not what human speech could express; for it is very observable that when he asserts what he saw he makes no mention of "the glory of God," but confines himself to the opening of the heavens, and the manifestation of Christ at the right hand of the Father. It is not for us to speculate where the martyr is silent. We can only suppose that "the glory of God" that was shown to him, was some special display of the Divine presence calculated to assure the sufferer that the Almighty would support him in his trial, and receive him after death. But the manifestation of our Blessed Redeemer, forasmuch as He went up to heaven, and still dwells there in human form, may be examined by us with the closest attention, and will be found, both in itself and in its effects upon Stephen, replete with interest and instruction. Let it be, then, upon this that we chiefly employ the remainder of our discourse. Come and let us place ourselves by the martyr in his hour of tribulation—if we can speak of tribulation where there is such visible triumph—and let us consider (for it may tend greatly to our own encouragement) what there was in his seeing the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God to nerve him to meeting death with the composure depicted in our text: "They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

NP Now when our Blessed Lord and Saviour had finished upon earth the great work which had been given Him to do, He ascended up on high that He might receive the covenanted reward. St. Paul, in speaking of our Lord humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, affirms that therefore "God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." ~~It thus may be taken as the general tenor of Scripture representation, that~~ Christ after effecting our redemption through suffering and obedience, entered into Heaven as into a state of repose; not, indeed, to receive at once the fulness of recompense—for that will not be until He come again in power and great majesty; ~~—but to place himself on the~~ throne, and to be invested with a dominion which, if acquired by suffering and struggle, is not to need the like means in order whether to permanence or extension. Thus the apostle declares to the Hebrews—"This man, after having offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down at the right hand of God, from thenceforth expecting until his enemies be made his footstool." Now observe particularly what the attitude is. Our Lord is represented as "sitting" at the right hand of God—thus being, as it were, in an attitude of repose and at the same time of expectation. Christ sits down it is said, "for ever at the right hand of God, from thenceforth expecting"—as though nothing was to be done but wait—"from thenceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." ~~It is~~ thus David announces him when in prophecy he called him Lord, "The Lord said unto my Lord; Sit thou on

but in fulfilment of the prophecy

my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool." Thus again, when St. Paul would exhort us to prove our being risen with Christ by seeking those things which are above, he describes heaven as a place where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. And once more, the same apostle, in the sublime passages in which he opens the Epistle to the Hebrews, says that Christ, "when he had by himself purged away our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." We need not multiply testimonies. We may safely take it as the common representation of Scripture, that our Blessed Saviour sat down at God's right hand; the attidude denoting that, having accomplished the great work of redemption, he had but to wait in quietness and repose till his enemies should be subdued, and the time should arrive for his triumphant manifestation to a rejoicing universe.

Now, ~~you will observe~~, in opposition to this common representation, ~~that~~ it was not as sitting, but as standing, on the right hand of God, that our Lord was beheld by dying Stephen. This is very remarkable. ~~Contrast the saying already quoted~~ from St. Paul, "For ~~ever sat~~ down ~~on~~ the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting,"—contrast this with the vision vouchsafed to the martyr—the vision in which our Blessed Saviour is represented as "~~standing~~" on the right hand of God. ~~What are we to say to the apparent contradiction?~~ What ~~but that nothing~~ could be better adapted to cheer and sustain the martyr than such ~~an apparent contradiction?~~ It was as though, moved by the opposition to his cause, and by the violence offered to his servant, the Redeemer had risen up from his place, that he might act the part of Advocate and Protector. It was as though, having remained in an attitude of repose whilst as yet his messengers had not been called to resist unto blood, he had been roused by the cry of the infuriated multitude, and assumed a new position when persecution had taken its more savage form. And it might be hard to imagine any single fact more expressive of all that was best suited to the upholding and comforting Stephen. You have only to suppose the martyr impressed with the common idea that the Saviour had sat down at the right hand of God till his enemies were subdued; and it must have been like a revelation of the intense interest which Christ took in the welfare of the church, and of his resolve to undertake and carry on the defence of his followers, that it was not as sitting, but as standing, that he was privileged to behold him. There might have been all the brilliancy of a celestial manifestation, and the invisible world might have been so far disclosed as that the eye of flesh might have gazed on unutterable things; and there upon a throne of light, surrounded by whatsoever could betoken supremacy, might have been seated the majestic form of the Son of man; and we dare not say that as the martyr had looked upon the Saviour thus reposing amid the insignia of power and glory, he would not have been ready to exclaim with righteous exultation, "Greater is he in heaven than he was in the world." But nevertheless it might hardly have seemed the attitude of one intent upon deliverance and protection; and something like a suspicion might have crossed the mind, that he who sat there in all the depths of unruffled tranquillity had become, through his removal from immediate contact with suffering and trial, less capable of sympathy, and less intent upon advocacy. But lo! he has risen from his throne. The struggle has begun; the hands of the wicked have been thrown up to assail the brethren of Christ; persecution has thrown off its disguise, and shown itself bent on calling into being "the noble army of martyrs;" and the Redeemer, the Intercessor, like one who could no longer remain inactive, but must come forward as the Champion of his own cause, has changed his attitude, and now displays himself to his servant prepared for his defence. Oh! in how minute a circumstance may there be a depth, and intenseness of instruction, and comfort. This change of attitude, how easy to overlook! how expressive, when observed, of all that Stephen could wish to know in his parting hour, of all that can encourage the church in the still protracted struggle with principalities and powers! A Defender *sitting* at the right hand of God! nay, there is vast comfort in this; but a Defender *standing* at the right hand of God!—standing—not merely standing, but—for this is the important fact

—standing after having been seated, after having sat down "for ever," like one who had only henceforwards to wait—all warfare over, all necessity for interference at an end—and the change of posture taking place at the very moment when martyrdom commenced—ah! then who will venture to suppose or suspect it possible that the church may be forgotten or forsaken, or any one of its members left without adequate succour in the season of affliction? I wonder not that the martyr's eye brightened. What was it to him that the savage throng pressed upon him to take away his life? His gaze was upon a Mediatior, not as reposing from conflict, but as risen up to battle; and how could he fail to conquer whilst he followed such a Leader? Observe how Stephen distinctly specifies the attitudes of Christ. He saw, we are told, "the glory of God;" but he makes no mention of the glory of God. It was not that glory with all its brilliance which ministered most to the assurance of the sufferer, but the seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he dwelt on this, he kept not silence on this, he commemorates this with the greatest exactness. It is not merely, "I saw Jesus," nor, "I saw Jesus at the right hand of God," but, "I saw the Son of man *standing* at the right hand of God." The attitude, the posture, gave confidence, and it should do so still. Friends may behold Christ standing; enemies shall behold him sitting; for it is to enemies the Lord himself said—"Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, coming in the clouds of heaven." Be not then dismayed, ye who may have to profess Christ's religion in the midst of multiplied danger or fierce opposition. We might venture almost to say that, having risen from his seat when martyrdom commenced, Christ had not yet resumed that seat, but is still standing—standing as a Leader, standing as a Champion. Lift ye up your eyes towards heaven; gaze with the intent gaze of faith on the place where God dwelleth; and it will be no wonder if you are able to smile at persecution, and to enjoy a deep, rich peace in the midst of tumult and tribulation; you may have something of the same manifestation as was granted to Stephen. And who wonders as to what is told us in our text as to the way in which Stephen met death, when he has considered the vision wherewith the martyr was favoured? He saw the Son of man standing at God's right hand, and was thereby assured of the power and good will of the Redeemer. Shall we hesitate to commit our spirit to his keeping? And when he looked on the Lamb of God may not the sight have reminded him how he had prayed for his murderers, and thus admonished him into what form to cast his last words? So that, from examining what Stephen saw, you are at once prepared for what Stephen said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And oh! no marvel that it was immediately afterwards recorded, "When he had said this, he fell asleep."

Now, in comparing the Evangelist's account of Stephen's vision with the martyr's own statement, you will observe that not only do the two agree in making special mention of the attitude of Christ, but that there was a change in the name, the title by which the Saviour is described. The evangelist relates of Stephen that "he saw *Jesus* standing on the right hand of God." Stephen relates of himself, "I saw *the Son of Man* standing on the right of God." This variation ought not to be passed over without significance or as offering nothing in explanation of the composure, or rather triumph, which our text ascribes to the martyred man. It is the more remarkable if you take into consideration Stephen's omitting to speak of "the glory of God" which formed part of his vision. He seems to have fastened eagerly on what was human in the wondrous manifestation, and thence to have derived his main support and consolation. There was something human in the attitude of the Mediator. It was just what a man would do on hearing of the peril in which a dear friend was placed—he would rise from his seat eager to bring him succour; and Stephen, whilst commemorating the change in the attitude, applies that name to the Saviour which is most replete with human association: he calls him "the Son of Man;" so that you may evidently see, the bent of his thoughts was on the great truth that "we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," but one who was himself "made perfect through suffering." It was not that the dying martyr thought little of the great doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, as if he could have dispensed with that doctrine, and was content to view only the man in the Mediator. None but one brim full, so to speak, of this doctrine, one habituated to the regarding and addressing Christ as a person of the Godhead, could have committed his soul in his dying moments to Christ, calling upon him and saying, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." But nevertheless, the cheering, the sustaining consciousness appears to have been in beholding the Mediator as a man—a man who had tasted a man's sorrows, and had died a man's death. He dwells on seeing the Saviour standing—the posture that of a man. He commemorates him as the Son of man, selecting that title which told most of affinity and brotherhood; and let us not be afraid, beloved brethren, in imitating the first martyr in thus leaning on the human nature of the Lord our Redeemer. The many tears which He wept in his humiliation, rather than the many crowns which He wears in his exaltation, minister comfort to the suffering and the dying. It is not so much of his power that the afflicted and persecuted being needs to be assured; it is rather of the tenderness of his compassion, of his readiness to exert that power on behalf of those who believe on his name. The suspicion most likely to be entertained by any one surrounded by dangers and assailed by enemies, is not a suspicion that his case wants more than Christ can supply, but rather that he is so beneath the notice of Christ, that he is so debased, whilst Christ is so exalted, that he shall probably be overlooked, and not obtain in his insignificance the succour which he needs; and this suspicion is to be met and removed by a reference to the human nature of Christ, to his having not only been man whilst on earth, but to his being man now, having carried up to heaven the very body in which he suffered and died. Oh! what a vast difference it would have made to us had Christ cast off human nature and left it behind him when he ascended up on high to resume the glory which he had before the world was. Not perhaps that this would have necessarily affected the completeness of our redemption. Christ may perhaps have paid the debt to the last fraction, though Divinity had disunited itself from humanity so soon as those sufferings on which the former set the stamp of infinite worth were at an end; but oh! what a difference would it have made in our comfort and assurance! how timidly, in comparison, must we have approached the Redeemer! with what hesitation, what mistrust! But seeing that he is still a man, a man who still retains, it may be, the marks of his sufferings, and, beyond all doubt, their memory—for what else can we infer from it having been as a "Lamb as it had been slain" that the Saviour was beheld by St. John in the midst of the throne?—who shall be discouraged? who shall fear repulse? Make, then, much use of the truth of the humanity of Christ. You greatly need that truth while you live; you will find that you need it no less when you come to die. Amidst the struggles of dissolution, it will be like an anchor to the soul to remember that your Saviour is your brother; your brother in having undergone death—your brother in having retained your nature in his glorious exaltation. As with Stephen, there might then be granted to you a vision of brilliant and beautiful things; but what you will especially crave will be the rod and staff of the good Shepherd, these will comfort you. A glimpse of Christ in his majesty, but a vision of Christ also as a man, with a man's sensibilities and a man's sympathies—give us this, and then "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Dying believers, like this leader of the noble army of martyrs, might be privileged by the withdrawing of the veil which hangs darkly between the present and the future, and with radiant manifestations of the magnificent realities to be possessed when all struggle shall be ended: but it would not be the burning beauty of the unseen state which caused the countenance to glow with so sudden a lustre; it would rather be, that amidst all the glory and all the gorgeousness of the discovered inheritance, there had been a sight of Christ, not merely as clothed with the attributes of the Godhead, but as retaining the attributes of manhood; and were you to bend down and ask the expiring Christian—'What hast thou beheld, that can so illumine the dark valley? Is it on the gate of pearl, or on the street of gold, or on the "rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald," that thy eye is permitted to gaze?' Ah! we believe, that like Stephen, the departing man would attempt no mention of the glory of God, but would speak of the Son of Man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Yes, yes, there is this comfort to be drawn from the human nature of our Lord. But always remember that two things are to be combined—the trusting in Christ as a propitiation, and the taking Christ as a pattern. Observe from our text how these met in Stephen. There was trust in Christ as a propitiation, for he committed to him the keeping of his soul; there was taking Christ as a pattern, for he copied his Lord in praying for his murderers. Well, then, might he die happily. Gazing upon the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, he was enabled to say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit; Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And how naturally may we look for the beautiful words with which our text concludes: "And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Now, once more, there is an expression used of Stephen, which goes far to explain how this first martyr met death with such calmness and constancy. He is expressly described as being "full of the Holy Ghost." Indeed the same description is given of Stephen before his martyrdom. It was not only in his last moments that he was "full of the Holy Ghost." No sooner is his name mentioned by the Evangelist as chosen to be one of the deacons than he is characterized as "a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost." Here, we may believe, was the secret of his strength. He had yielded himself up to the teachings of the Holy Ghost; he had obeyed the motions of the Spirit; and when the time of trial came and a crown of martyrdom was to be won, "he saw heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." There is no other way of preparing to meet death with composure and gladness but by giving ourselves up to be taught and led by God's Spirit. His Spirit was promised under the title of the Comforter; his Spirit, therefore, it must be which administers comfort when all human succours fail. We are not to expect, however, its cheering influences at the last unless, day by day, we yield ourselves to be renewed by it after the image of God. To live holily is the way to die happily. It is not necessarily by constant meditations upon death, by distinct and set preparations for the act of death, that we may best hope to fit ourselves for departure out of life. The patient discharge of the duties of to-day goes furthest towards ensuring the cheerful endurance of the trials of to-morrow; and he who is obeying God's Spirit as it prompts him to self-denial, to virtue, to charity, to righteousness, may confidently reckon that when death shall be at hand that Spirit will support him, and enable him to trample the last enemy under foot. He who, on the other hand, is not careful as to grieving God's Spirit—who, if in the main, he give heed to religion yet has his seasons of indolence, when he relaxes in the high endeavour to work out his salvation with fear and trembling—let not such a one expect to be triumphant in death. In the language of St. Paul he must "die daily"—die daily through the crucifixion of himself—who would hope to die fearlessly when summoned to appear at the judgment seat of Christ. Stephen was "full of the Holy Ghost." His was no half-hearted Christianity; he had wholly surrendered himself to the teaching from above, keeping nothing back; no corner for the world, no recess for "philosophy and science, falsely so called;" but a giving up his soul to heavenly wisdom, an emptying of himself that he might be "filled with all the fulness of God."

And for what a death did such a life prepare him! We have already pointed out to you how beautifully his two recorded prayers display the two principles which meet in the constitution of genuine vital Christianity—the trusting in Christ as a propitiation, and the taking Christ as a pattern: the one exhibited in the prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,"—for surely this displays faith in the one Mediator between God and man—and the other exhibited in the prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;" for what was this but a most exact imitation of the Lord our Redeemer, who uttered this petition on behalf of his murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And since Stephen is all along described as "full of the Holy Ghost," we may be sure that these two principles were earnestly at work whilst he lived as well as at that solemn moment when he was summoned to die. And again we say, for what a death did such a life prepare him! It is common to say of believers, that they "sleep in Jesus." You remember how St. Paul uses the expression, when writing to the Thessalonians, "Sorrow not as others which have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." The difference is very remarkable. Jesus died; he tasted death in all its bitterness; but as though his death had altogether altered death, believers are not spoken of as dying, but only as sleeping in Jesus. It is thus that on the warrant of Scripture we give a pleasurable image to death, representing it as nothing but slumbering,—slumber which is all the sweeter and more peaceful, forasmuch as the pillow is the arm of a mighty and affectionate Protector. But we ordinarily use the term when the believer departs amid the sighs and tears and attentions of relations and friends, worn, it may be, by the inroads of protracted disease, but soothed by the kindnesses of those whose chief pain it is that they cannot mitigate the suffering. We might almost feel as if the expression were out of place if we had to speak of the Christian dying amid the roar of the battle, or the rush of the storm, and yet more if he were departing from life through an onset of persecution, with savage forms around him, uttering execrations of blasphemy. Nevertheless it was thus that Stephen departed; and yet Stephen's death is described as nothing but falling asleep. Imitating his blessed Master, he prayed for his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;" and when he had breathed out this prayer, breathed it out with a loud voice that all might witness in what charity he died,—then you read "When he had said this, he fell asleep." Fell asleep! amid the shower of stones and the shouts of the infuriated rabble! So harmless, nay, so bland, and so benignant is death even in its shape of greatest terror, to those who, being "full of the Holy Ghost," can behold the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! What encouragement to us that we be very watchful against grieving the Holy Spirit, that we be diligent in avoiding what may tempt him to leave us, and in acting up to his secret suggestions. This Spirit, as you know, is imaged by a dove—a bird that may be easily scared away. A dove may come back once, yea twice: but if often sent forth, it will take its final flight, and turn no more to it desecrated nest. Endeavour then more and more to cherish the Spirit. Every impulse to prayer—obey it without delay. Every remonstrance against a bad habit—act on it without pause. Every prompting to righteous exertion—receive it as demanding immediate obedience. These will prepare you to fall asleep on any bed which God may appoint at your last hour, even were it as hard a bed as that of Stephen, whom they stoned with stones till he died. It is not the roughness of the bed which shall make death other than as a sleep, if the Dove be there to spread its wing beneath thy head. Whilst other sleep is often haunted by gorgeous dreams and visions of beauty which alas! to awake is to lose; this sleep shall be preceded by an opening of the heavens, and dazzling processions of light and life; but oh! to awake shall not be to lose, but to realize these visions. God grant to all of us so to "live the life of the righteous," that we may at length die their death. Or should we be living in expectation of the second coming of the Son of Man, "unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time without sin unto salvation." And if indeed, we be of those who are anticipating the return of him whom the heavens have received until the times of the restitution of all things, our last utterances may well be thrown into the same form as those of the martyred Stephen: we shall be in charity with all, as following the example of the Lord, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again;" and it will only be the breathing of our daily prayer to say, "Even so, come Lord Jesus. Into thy hands I commit my spirit."

THE MINISTRY OF VENGEANCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, MARCH 4, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good."—Amos ix. 2—4.

WHAT a variety, what a reduplication of expression in order to represent as utterly impossible that the parties who are here threatened could escape the vengeance of their God! We are very much struck with the constant repetition of the word "thence." "They may climb up to heaven; *thence* will I bring them down: they may dig into hell; *thence* shall mine hand take them: they may hide on the top of Carmel; I will search and take them *thence;* they may be buried in the bottom of the sea; *thence* will I command the serpent; though they go into captivity, *thence* will I command the sword." It matters not, you observe, where the threatened parties might be, or whither they might betake themselves: the agency of vengeance is always close at hand. Wherever they are found, there will be found a ministry to execute God's vengeance. This is the remarkable thing on which we wish to fasten in the long passage which we have taken as a text. The criminal cannot be where vengeance is not ready to execute its purposes, just as our Lord declared, "Wheresoever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together." It may be that the prophecy of Amos referred primarily to the kingdom of Israel which was to be destroyed for the continued wickedness of Jeroboam and his successors; yet it is generally, and with justice, thought that the prediction glances on to a sterner and more extensive desolation, and finds its thorough fulfilment in the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent calamities of the Jews. At all events, there can be no doubt that the language just used applies accurately to these fearful occurrences, and we may therefore safely take them as included in the prophecy. At the same time we ought not to confine our remarks to any one nation or any one season. It may be that there are great senses in which the prediction before us is fulfilled in the experience of all. See then what are the topics on which we can discourse. In the words on which we have to speak, we have affirmed to us the greatness, the certainty, the ubiquity of Divine vengeance. Wheresoever the guilty one is, there is an instrumentality close at hand for executing the punishment of his sins. We are to endeavour to exemplify this, first in the case of the Jews; and secondly, in our own case: that is, in both instances it will be our object to show, that though men dig into hell, thence shall God's hand take them; and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will he command the sword, and it shall slay them.

Now, we wish you to bear in mind the emphasis which we have laid on the word *thence*, which we find so often repeated in the text. We are not about to enlarge on the well known fact that sooner or later God's vengeance overtakes the impenitent. The memorable thing is, that wherever the impenitent be found, when the day of vengeance has arrived, in hell, in heaven, on Carmel, in the sea, in captivity, thence will God fetch, there will God find an avenger. If this is to be illustrated in the case of the Jews, it will not be enough that we linger over the ruins of Jerusalem; we must follow the exiles in their dispersion. We often find occasion in the course of our public ministrations to direct attention to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews. So signal and so evident is the accomplishment of the prophecy, as traced in these events, that the preacher turns naturally to them, whenever he would display the superhuman foresight of Christ. There is, indeed, one evil which is apt to result from this frequent appeal to the downfall of the once favoured people, and which is only to be guarded against by carefulness in collecting the various predictions which have to do with that people's destruction. The evil which is referred to is this: Jerusalem comes to be regarded in much the same light as Tyre or Babylon, and the Jews are considered as filling a like place with the Edomites or Egyptians. We forget, in our eagerness to draw striking illustrations of the prostrate city and the scattered people, that the city has to be rebuilt, and the people to be gathered home. The ruins of Jerusalem are not to be visited as the ruins of Babylon, merely as a monumental pillar in the vast desert of centuries, graven with evidences how God's threatenings came to pass; they are rather to be surveyed as the chaos from which, as from that over which brooded the Divine Spirit, ere the world rose in beauty, will yet spring the symmetry and the stateliness of a metropolis hallowed by the special presence of our God. And wanderers, for the most part, may her children be—scattered amongst all nations, and yet confounded with none—everywhere settlers, and yet everywhere foreigners; nevertheless, they are not to be accounted, like the Arabs in the desert, or the fishermen of Sidon, mere witnesses, however eloquent, to the accomplishment of wrathful predictions; they are the heirs of the noblest promises that either they or their children should have the world for an empire.

But when we have guarded against so dwelling on the ruin, as to lose sight of the restoration of Israel, we may be frequently contemplating, and with increasing advantage, the past and the present fulfilment of predictions which have reference to the Jews; for in no case is the fulfilment more striking: so that it were not too much to say, that the Jew has been, and is, the standing miracle of the existing dispensation, supplying the place of a series of supernatural demonstrations, that the gospel which we preach is the word of the living God. We shall not now go at length (for it is not required for the illustration of our text) into the particulars of the overthrow of Jerusalem,—the mysterious warnings,—the heralds of vengeance,—the shadowy armies which met and jostled in the sky,—the fearful meteor, shaped into a sword, which hung over the city,—the massive temple gates opened without hands,—the awful voice as of a departing God, heard from the deep recesses of the sanctuary. We speak not now of these terrible portents, though not more amazing in themselves than as bearing out the explicit prophecies of Scripture; and we shall not present to you the oft-drawn picture of the siege and conquest of the infidel city, though there is scarcely a particular in the harrowing narrative of the historian Josephus, which does not seem narrated on purpose to verify what our Lord had predicted; but our text, as applied to the Jews, requires us to take a wider sweep. If it relate, as we suppose, to the vengeance which was about to overtake that people, after their rejection of Christ, it indicates that wrath would find them out wheresoever they might be; not merely in Jerusalem, not merely in Judea, but in every city where they might have made themselves a home; in every country to which they might have fled: God's hand is to take them out of hell and fetch them down from heaven; they are to be dragged from the top of Carmel; the serpent is to bite them in the depths of the sea; the sword is to smite them in the land into which they are carried captive. Thus our text is a very wide and comprehensive prophecy, extending itself to various places and to various ages. But it does not assert more than is to be established by history. For if it were specially in the destruction of Jerusalem that these threatenings were accomplished, it is easy to show, that at the same time, as well before as after, vengeance, as though by a kind of natural instinct, seized on the Jews wheresoever they were found. We read in Josephus of 13,000 Jews slain at Scythopolis, of 50,000 at Alexandria, 40,000 at Joppa, 10,000 at Damascus, and 10,000 at Ascalon. In short (for it is sickening to enumerate the slaughter) it appears that in a space of less than forty years, and exclusive of those who perished in the siege of Jerusalem, there fell by the sword in different cities and countries, not fewer than 380,000 Jews; an enormous number, but which, nevertheless, perhaps requires to be almost doubled, when you know that Josephus speaks only of the destruction of the male population, saying nothing of that of the female, though it could not have been much less. And you are not to think that the days of vengeance terminated to the Jews, with the destruction produced by the wars of Nero and Vespasian. Forty years after the close of those wars the same space having elapsed as between Christ's ascension and the destruction of Jerusalem, the sword was again unsheathed under the emperor Trajan, and the eagle and the serpent again fastened on their prey. In Egypt, and Africa, and Mesopotamia, the Jews are said to have been nearly exterminated, though their number was very large; so fiercely did vengeance batten on the carcase of a nation, which was both spiritually and politically dead. And afterwards, in the time of Adrian, when the Jews revolted under a leader who gave himself out as the Messiah, there came a war and a desolation which singularly resembled the first, by which they had been scattered. It seemed as if God designed to make the judgments which were more immediately occasioned by their following a false Christ, the exact counterparts of those which had come on them for their rejecting the true. The Rabbies say, that in the destruction of those days, there perished twice as many souls as came out of Egypt under Moses; yet we read in the account of the Exodus of "600,000 on foot that were men, beside children." Yea, and we thus speak only of the slain; but the birds of prey not content, as it were, with glutting themselves with the body, bore away in their talons its mangled remains; for after all these wars, thousands of the Jews were distributed throughout the Roman provinces, to wear away life in slavery, or to perish in the theatres and in the gladiatorial shows. And when the Roman power was crippled, and the throne of the Cæsars crumbled into dust, did the birds of prey cease to find out and fasten on the body? On the contrary, just as by a strange but unerring instinct, the ravenous and unclean fowls of heaven congregate over the dead, whether in the city or in the solitude; thus has persecution seemed to hunt the Jew, never failing to discover him, and never failing to harass him, finding him on the top of Mount Carmel, biting him as a serpent in the depth of the sea.

You are all aware that the history of the Jews, since their exile from Jerusalem has been a history of fierce wrongs, disgraceful to the nations of the earth, of extortion, contempt, hatred, cruelty; the history of a people which every other seemed anxious to exterminate, or to preserve only that they might oppress. Through a perpetual miracle—a miracle of which the continuance diminishes nothing of the wonderfulness—the Jew has been kept distinct from, though dwelling with every nation under heaven; politically dead, for he has never had a government of his own; spiritually dead, for he has been unable to perform the rites even of his own religion; and thus has he always and everywhere been exposed to persecution; and even where he may have attempted concealment, conforming himself as much as possible to the customs, and adapting himself to the prejudices of his oppressor, yet it has been with him as with a carcase over which may have drifted the sand of the desert, but which the ravenous bird soon detected and dragged from its useless grave.

Very heavy indeed is the account which nations, and more especially Christian nations, have treasured up against themselves by their treatment of the Jew, for it has been no excuse that they have thereby been accomplishing prophecy: the wickedness has been the same, though overruled by God to the completion of his purposes and his threatenings; even as in the case of the Jews themselves, who were not a jot less criminal in crucifying Christ, because they thereby brought about what God had before ordained. But we are now concerned with nothing but the simultaneous and protracted vengeance which the prophet in our text seems to denounce against the Jews: and if the words under review refer to what would come upon the people who rejected Christ, they have been verified by the whole course of events from that time. He was indeed a prophet who could utter such a saying. It would have been much to have predicted merely the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, for even these events were against all probability. The Roman polity was against their occurrence; and when indeed the magnificent sanctuary fell, it fell against the will of the conqueror, who long laboured to preserve the glorious structure. But though even this was far beyond human foresight, what are we to say of a prescience which tracked the Jew through every land and through every age, which saw the nation scattered like the fragments of a shipwreck, amid the islands and mountains of the earth, and discovered that where the people seemed to find a resting place, there would gather over them the unclean brood of injustice, perfidy, and cruelty, as though the Jew were to attract persecution, even as the carcase does the eagles? Such was the prophecy, and such has been the history. In some lands, and in some days, through the increasing spread of Christian principles, the Jew may have been safe from oppression; but there has always been scorn enough and contempt enough, even in the absence of open violence, to vindicate such figures as those of our text. The serpent and the sword seemed to start forth wheresoever the exiles were found. And we do indeed discover the comprehensive meaning of the prophecy. The seer's glance seems to take in the occurrences of all time and of all place, when, having to speak of calamities that would come upon the nation. Amos, or rather God speaking by Amos, does not confine himself to this or that nation, or to this or that season, but emphatically says: "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them: though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them."

We have already said that such a passage as our text may be applied to some more general case than that of the Jews. You observe the passage implies the utter impossibility of vengeance being escaped. The representation, as you will see, is that of vengeance being endowed with a kind of instinct; so that, by a natural and indomitable impulse, it is always to be about the Jew, settling over him if he rested, and pursuing him if he fled. And we just give it you as a marvellous proof of Divine interference, an incontestible evidence of the working of a righteous moral Governor, that, according to this application of the prophecy, the Jew and his punishment have always travelled together, as though not to be separated till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

But we now wish you to observe, whether this be more than a particular instance of the general course of the Divine retribution; whether the like argument is not furnished on a much wider scale, from universal experience; whether, in short, it be not equally a truth, and equally an instructive truth, with reference to all men as well as the Jews, that they may hide themselves on the top of Carmel, but God will take them thence; they may be hid in the depths of the sea, and thence will God command the serpent, and it shall bite them. We are never weary of contemplating those indications which God has woven up into the constitution of man and things. We live beneath a moral government, a government that is already one of punishment and reward, and of which therefore we cannot but expect that it will preserve hereafter the same retributive character. We have a great interest in contemplating these indications, because with all our sense of the insufficiency of what is called natural religion, and our need of revealed, we feel as though the voice which hath spoken to us from heaven were more manifestly that of our Maker, when we find its utterances echoed by the monitor within, and the creation without. And we do not suppose that, to a thinking mind, any intelligence as to the moral government of God can be much clearer or more decisive than that which is derived from the workings of conscience, and the consequences of actions. You all know that whilst the present is the season of probation, rather than of recompense, God hath made happiness and misery so greatly dependent on conduct as to leave us inexcusable, if we think to find him anything but the determined foe of sin and the patron of righteousness. He has so constructed us, that we have a sense of satisfaction when we do right, and of dissatisfaction when we do wrong. It is hardly possible—it is possible only after long and desperate struggling with conscience—to get free from this process of immediate retribution; a process through which, without the preliminaries of a judicial inquiry, or the formalities of a trial, the sentence is both passed and carried into effect. We wish you well to observe, that by setting up a tribunal in every man's heart, and placing a judge there—a judge, moreover, who rapidly executes his own sentence—God hath given us such evidence of his own character, and of that of his government, as would alone suffice for our consideration, if we lived as though we knew not of his resolve to deal with us hereafter according to our conduct here; for the decisions and inflictions of conscience are not only uniformly on the side of virtue, and in opposition to vice, but inasmuch as dread is a chief element in all the punishments dealt out by conscience, and hope in all its rewards, there is the preaching of futurity in its every working. If there were no other scene and season of retribution, what place would there be for dread? what place for hope? And thus in the sense of satisfaction which rises within me when I do right, there is more than a witness that God now approves virtue; I find expectation mingled with the satisfaction; and expectation is a witness that he will hereafter reward righteousness: whilst, on the other hand, in the sense of dissatisfaction when I do wrong, there is more than a witness that God now abhors vice; I find fear mingled with the dissatisfaction; and fear is a witness that he will hereafter punish wickedness. Neither is this witnessing power of conscience confined to an age or country; it hath been in existence everywhere and always; it is still in full play, in all sections of the earth; and unless there be coming a day when the constitution is to be radically changed it will continue in full play until at last the season of probation finally give place to that of retribution. We do not mean to assert that the voice of conscience is never overborne; but we do assert, that whensoever and wheresoever lifted up, it is uniformly lifted up on the side of righteousness, and in opposition to wickedness; and that however individuals may have succeeded in bearing down its supremacy, and silencing its remonstrances, they have had at times its full witness delivered thrillingly in their breasts, and are therefore not in the position of those who can plead that they are excusable, because left without evidence, but rather of those who prove themselves utterly inexcusable, from their having subdued an evidence by which they ought to have been convinced.

Hence what we are quite entitled to call the theology of conscience is a universal theology; universal as that of the sun and the stars, which have always and everywhere preached by their everlasting march the greatness and the goodness of God. And here we make the application of our text, considered as descriptive of God's dealings with our race. We showed you that the Jew, a wanderer over the earth, but everywhere dogged by vengeance, was a signal witness to the unwearied workings of the government of God. But now we have to fasten your attention on just the same invariable and inevitable retribution, in the instance of every one amongst ourselves; yea, of every one of our race. You say of the Jew, and say very justly, that whithersoever he hath gone he hath been followed by the vengeance that has found him out, and settled on him as its prey. But surely there is not more of truth—not more of wonderful truth in this, than in another fact of which all are witnesses, namely, that every one of us carries the serpent about with him in his own breast; so that he has only to do wrong, and, lo! without any express mustering of the ministry of vengeance, the bird of prey is upon him, gnawing at his heart. The surprising thing in the instance of the Jew is, that there has been nothing local, and nothing temporary in his punishment; but as though there were a kind of affinity between himself and vengeance, in his every wandering, and his every concealment, there and thence has started up the avenger. But this is not one jot more surprising than that there should be nothing local and nothing temporary in the avenging power of conscience; but that every man should so mark himself out by sinfulness for punishment, that he cannot place himself where he does not find the executioner ready to carry into effect God's edict against evil. The case of the Jew seems to us a sort of exemplification of that of the whole race; and in the kind of instinct with which vengeance has appeared to follow the exiles of Judea, in the mysterious but indissoluble association between themselves and suffering, we have but the picture of what has been universally appointed to the exiles from paradise. They may cross the ocean, and ascend the mountain, and dive into the cavern, but can never hide themselves from conscience, which, armed with fearful powers, is always ready to put on them the stamp of offenders, and to exact from them some of the penalties of offence. If the appearance of the Jew has been a kind of signal for the apppearance of the serpent and the sword, the case has been and is the same generally with sinners. The commission of sin seems to produce the ministry of vengeance; its cry is heard as soon as the guilty pleasure has been enjoyed. We cannot for a moment doubt that this, the retributive power of conscience, will quite suffice to vindicate the final condemnation of any of the earth's families, who may have lived as though ignorant of God's righteous moral government; for it is not here, it is not there, it is everywhere, that conscience puts forth its emphatic demonstrations. If these demonstrations were only given in particular cases, and after particular seasons, there might be the pleading that many had been without them, and could not therefore be justly condemned on their testimony; but the sun is not more general in its shining than conscience in its working, and if the working be unobserved, it is only as the shining may be through such a closing of the eye as makes men answerable for their ignorance. We care not who the individual may be, whom you suppose summoned to God's bar, and there put upon trial; whether the disciple of natural or revealed religion; whether nursed in the philosophy of Greece and Rome, or degraded by the rudeness of savage life. We feel that the legislator, and at the same time the executioner, was planted in his breast when born, and remained there as he grew up—one which witnessed against wickedness, punished its commission, and thus by testifying of a moral Governor of the universe, left him self-condemned, if he lived as though no account were made of his actions; therefore are we prepared to justify the sentence beneath which he may perish, even if we could point out no other advantage which he had enjoyed, than that of observing the instituted and indissoluble connection between sin and suffering—a connection so like that between the wandering Jew and the ministry of vengeance, that we may give it as the general illustration of God's moral dealings: "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them: and though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them."

But the saying of our text is yet to be applied in a manner which may bring it still more personally home to ourselves. We know that the predictions in the New Testament which refer to the destruction of Jerusalem glance onwards to yet mightier events, describing what shall take place at the second coming of Christ. It would seem to be the representation of Scripture, that he should be universally seen. "Behold," saith St. John, "he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him." Every eye! The eye of every dweller in every spot, as though the amazing manifestation were to be made at the very same moment to all the cities, and all the islands, and all the valleys of the earth, and the magnificently awful form of the anointed Judge of quick and dead, were to be visible at once to the myriads of the human population. We may not presume to determine the particulars, the details, of our Lord's second coming; but there is a practical importance in the representation of judgment taking place everywhere at once, which, however we may be unable to clear up, makes it deserve the being impressed on your minds; for God only knows in what wild and absurd thoughts or hopes, sinners will occasionally take refuge; but we are free to confess, that the common representations of judgment to come, the very grandeur, the sublime confusion, the gorgeous tumult, the innumerable gathering—all these, whilst addressing themselves irresistibly to the imagination, are not unsuited to exciting resort to the vain and dangerous expectation, that some cases may be overlooked, and others but cursorily considered. When you think of the throne erected in one particular spot, and of millions driven thither from most remote districts, that one by one they may be brought up to the tribunal, and undergo a moral scrutiny, why you can scarcely avoid feeling, that so vast a time would be required for the process, that so terrible would be the throng always pressing towards the bar, that it is almost inconceivable that there would be a rigid investigation of every individual. The very grandeur, as we have said, of the picture is calculated to suggest hope of escape, of being lost in the mighty crowd, or passed over in the seemingly interminable transaction. But if, according to such representations as that of our text, the judgment-place is everywhere, on the top of Carmel and in the depth of the sea, there is an end of such idle hopes as other representations may have encouraged. The scenery of the last dread assize is brought into every district, yea, into every household of the world; and it does not sweep the earth of its inhabitants, and gather them confusedly into one court of judicature, but it spreads that court of judicature over the whole earth; so that wheresoever a man is found, there is the white throne reared, there are the books opened, and there is the trumpet sounded. It might be that even now the moment of Christ's second coming had arrived. It might be that even now, as you sit before me, and around me, in rivetted attention, the crash of jostling elements would be heard, and the strange fires which are to blaze about the Lord light up this building with their ominous glare; but would not the same crash, at the same moment be heard on the distant shores of Asia and the deserts of Africa, on the soaring mountains and on the far-spreading plains of America? and would not that preternatural flash, just as though a beacon had been kindled on every eminence on the earth, to give signal of the coming of the Judge, fearfully illuminate every dwelling-place of man, whilst causing this solid structure to seem flooded with consuming fire? Yea, verily, we may not doubt, that all the portentous heraldry which announced the Son of Man, would be audible and visible to others, as well as to ourselves; so that wheresoever there moved one of our race, the startling summons would be equally, and at the same instant delivered. And would it be that we should be borne away, as by a whirlwind, from this our assembly, and mysteriously carried to some distant spot, in order to our being confronted with the Judge? No, not if our text may be rightly applied to Christ's second coming. Christ says, "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." Our text describes various localities, but declares that in every case thence shall the retribution spring; therefore we may conclude that we shall be judged here; here, where we are assembled for the purpose of worship; here, where you are sitting as professed disciples of the Lord, though as with the men lying in the same bed, or working in the same field, there may be vast moral differences under the uniformity of aspect; here would trial go forward and sentence be passed.

Who is to evade the scrutiny which is thus to be carried on, within the precincts of every church, yea, in the recesses of every household, yea, in the solitude of every heart? We must press on every one of you, the utter hopelessness of evading such a process of trial as is to be thus universal, and at the same time thus individual. I really do not know, in all the imagery of Scripture, anything which sets in a more striking point of view, the certainty of the destruction of the impenitent, than this placing the Divine hand on the top of Carmel, the serpent in the depth of the sea, the eagle wheresoever there is the carcase. It is saying in the most emphatic manner that wheresoever is wickedness, there will be vengeance. It is like making hell a character, rather than a locality. It is as much as saying, that if you gave a lost man the universe to wander through, it would be all hell to him; he would not place himself out of hell, though clothed with the wings of the morning, and permitted to enter glorious and blissful scenes, where heavenly spirits hymned the praises and wrought the will of their Creator. We think that such a representation as this, must destroy the vain confidence of the wicked, if anything can persuade them that if they die impenitent there remains nothing but a torment of anguish. Let them remember that the scriptural delineation of the unconverted is, that they are "dead in trespasses and sins;" and if not quickened on this side the grave they must remain everlastingly in this spiritual death, for there will be no place for repentance and justifying faith when the day of probation shall have passed. If they remain dead in trespasses and sins, what shall ever drive away that ministry of wrath which seizes upon such as its natural prey?

We cannot dwell longer upon this. We dwell on what is so terrible only in the hope that the unconverted amongst you will yet hearken to the quickening Word of God, and submit yourselves to the influences of his Spirit.

The cloud is not yet on Mount Carmel, neither is the serpent yet commanded from the depths of the sea; the dove still descends in its gentleness as from the opened heavens when the Saviour was baptized; the dove is still coming to us, as to Noah in the ark, with the olive branch in its mouth, that all might receive the proffers of mercy, without restriction: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, yea, come buy and eat; buy wine and milk without money and without price." The prophet sat on Mount Carmel, and sent his servant, fruitlessly at first, and for many times, but at last successfully, to look for the rain which should refresh the weary earth. Let not the ministers of Christ despond because they may often see nothing to encourage them. And I cannot thus refer to ministers of the gospel without being reminded by the sombre clothing of this church, that there has lately gone from this place one who had been for a lengthened period the faithful pastor of this parish. I had known him more than twenty years. We were of the same college, and whilst I was tutor at the college, he was one of the divinity professors of the university. During this long time I found increasing cause to respect and esteem the late Dr. Hollingworth as a true and kind-hearted man. I believe him to have been one who studied to have a conscience void of offence, both towards God and man; and it is the more fitting that this slight tribute should be paid to his memory, because all the attendants on this lectureship were much indebted to him for the facilities which he afforded and the comforts which he provided in regard of this our weekly service. He is gone to his grave in a good old age, but he will live in the memories of many, and we trust that in the great day of account there will be many to testify that his labours were not in vain in the Lord. But to return to what we were saying. Let not the ministers of Christ despond because they look often and see nothing to encourage them. The small cloud may be rising; yet a little while and there may fall plentiful showers amongst you of spiritual influence, so that those who are wandering may be reclaimed, and those who are hard hearted softened, and Christ—God grant that it be so—shall "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

THE RICH SENSUALIST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, MARCH 11, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."—Luke xii. 21.

You all no doubt are well acquainted with the parable, or narrative, of which these words are the conclusion. Our Lord had been applied to by an individual who wished him to assume to himself the office of the civil magistrate, and to settle the distribution of some contested property. You cannot fail to observe how careful Christ always was to avoid anything which might have given a handle to his enemies, anything which might have furnished them with an excuse for representing him to the Romans as a teacher of sedition, or an example of disaffection. In conformity with this his general habit, he refused, in very strong terms, to interfere in the manner proposed; and he so couched his refusal as to make it display no assumption of political authority, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?"

But there was another habit of our Lord, which was just as marked as that of his avoiding all interference with the office of the magistrate; we refer to his habit of adapting his discourse to the occasion, or of his drawing from the occasion the subject matter of his discourse. There are few things more observable in our Lord's registered conversations than this. If you read those conversations with attention, endeavouring all along to connect what is said with what has just happened, you will find that our Lord was evidently always on the watch for opportunities of inculcating some truth, or enforcing some lesson; and that often a trifling circumstance, or an incidental remark, suggested a parable or exhortation of the most weighty and interesting kind. He evidently felt that he had nothing to do, in his intercourse with men, but to endeavour to gain reception for certain great doctrines; and accordingly, wheresoever he was, whether with many or with few, in the city or in the village, in the synagogue or at the table, you will find him on the look out, as it were, for occasions of instruction, and with wonderful skill discovering and availing himself of occasions, while you hardly have supposed them to exist. In conformity with this his invariable practice, no sooner had he declined to interfere in a matter of disputed property, than he proceeded to deliver a parable in regard to the abuse of wealth. The parable, however, is prefaced by a caution: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The individual who had applied to him, or his brother, manifested an anxiety for temporal possessions, as though the more he had of these, the greater would be his security and his happiness. "Mistaken thought!" our Lord appears to exclaim, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He is not one jot the more likely to live long or to live happily because his riches are great than if he had no wealth on which to depend, but must trust to his daily labour for his daily bread. Then he described the case of a rich man, whose lands on one occasion, gave promise of even more than usual abundance. The man, you should observe, was already a rich man; he was already the owner of the estate. The harvest was likely to be more than commonly plenteous, and though his stores were about thus to receive a large increase, we may conclude that they had before been far from deficient. He surveys his fields waving with plenty; he computes that his barns will not be large enough for his produce, and he therefore determines to pull them down and to build greater. Against this determination, in itself, nothing could be said. It was quite right, that if God sent a richer than the ordinary harvest, due means should be used for preserving the bounty. But you are quickly made to see, that the rich man had an eye to nothing but his own selfish indulgence in this resolve of thus enlarging his storehouses; he goes on thus: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But no sooner had he announced his resolution of continuing to squander all upon himself, hoarding up for his own gratification, and caring nothing for the wants of any others, than there comes to him this startling message from God—"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee;" a message of which we may not doubt that it literally took effect, so that before the morning dawned this rash reckoner upon many years of life was stretched out a corpse.

Such is the parable or the history, for there is nothing to show that Christ may not have related what actually happened. The general object of the parable has already been sufficiently defined, and cannot, indeed, be easily overlooked by the most superficial reader. But we wish to examine with close attention, the points in the rich man's conduct which we may suppose to have been specially displeasing to God. We consider, that over and above the desperate selfishness which was manifested, and which must be apparent to you all, there are things indicated by the rich man's words, which must have greatly moved the Divine indignation. At the same time, the address of God to the rich worldling will be found, when diligently sifted, to contain sundry intimations which can hardly be detected by a cursory glance. Let us take these, then, as our subjects of discourse. The sinfulness of the rich man, as gathered from his address to his soul. The righteousness of the retribution which that sinfulness provoked; endeavouring all along to give the matter a personal application, seeing that according to our text, the case of the rich man is far enough from solitary, inasmuch as it is said: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Now, there is, unhappily, in all of us a tendency to the forgetting that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above;" that the silver and the gold are the Lord's, so that we can have nothing which we do not receive. We are disposed to the looking on second causes to the exclusion of the first, so that if in return for our industry and exertion we find that wealth accumulates, we easily overlook the fact that all we gain is from God, and we ascribe it to nothing but our own toil and our own talent. And, in some professions, this is more easily done than in others: we mean that, though all men are in reality equally dependant upon God, some men, from the very nature of their occupation, are more evidently so than others, so that they have even less excuse for anything like forgetfulness of the Great First Cause. And this, we think, is especially the case with those who have to do with agriculture; a profitable return, whatever the labour bestowed, is so evidenly dependent upon causes over which the husbandman can exert no control, that it looks almost like necessity that he should remember who it is that maketh the vallies thick with corn. The husbandman, if we may so express it, receives his wealth more immediately or more directly from the hand of God than any other person—than the artificer, for example, who is busied with some labour which, so long as he has health to continue it, seems sure to bring him in an adequate remuneration. As he plies the loom, or carries on any ordinary manufacture, he does not seem exposed to any of those risks with which the husbandman is continually threatened. His work goes on just as well, whatsoever the weather; he is not obliged to wait for the sun and the shower; and there is no fear that a sudden storm may destroy all the fruits of his toil just as he is on the point of gathering and securing them. Accordingly, we always regard an irreligious farmer as amongst the most striking proofs how far gone our race is from original righteousness. And the exhibition is altogether different from that of an irreligious shopkeeper: his dependence upon God for every farthing of profit, though equally actual, is not forced upon the notice of the shopkeeper as it is upon that of the farmer. There is apparently, much greater room for the working of second causes in the business of the shop than in that of the farm; and, though when there comes a sudden demand for the article in which he deals, and, therefore, an increase in the value of his stock, the tradesman is as actually indebted to God as is the husbandman when his fields produce abundant crops, it cannot be said that the mercy of the Divine bounty is as visible upon the money which the customers lay down upon the counter of the one, as it is on the golden sheaves which are gathered into the barns of other; and we can, therefore, see no shadow of an apology for the ingratitude and forgetfulness of the husbandman. The mode in which he becomes rich, if he become rich at all, and the very nature of his riches, should keep God continually in his thoughts as his benefactor. And since the wealth of the subject of our parable was wealth altogether drawn from agriculture, we suppose him to have been the more culpable in regarding these goods as in every sense his own, and in so speaking of them as to exclude all reference to the Giver. Now, without further insisting upon this, we wish to fix your attention on the very remarkable fact, that the rich man addressed his soul when forming his plan for a long course of selfishness. "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." And what had the soul to do with the indulgences and enjoyments which he thus thought that his riches would procure? Is it the soul which eats? Is it the soul which drinks? Is it the soul which luxuriates in voluptuous ease? Had he addressed his body, and thus seemed forgetful or ignorant of its being immortal, we must have wondered at him less, and have thought him less degraded; but to confess that he had a soul, and then to speak to that soul as though it were material, a mere animal thing, with fleshly appetites and passions, this marked him at the very outset, as being at the lowest point of sensuality; as though he knew no higher use of faculties which distinguished him from the brute, than to give a zest to gratifications which he had in common with the brute! But, nevertheless, there was truth in the address of the sensualist; he was not so mistaken as at first he might appear. He spake, indeed, to the soul as though he had reckoned it a part of the body, and thus seemed strangely to confound the corporeal and the spiritual; but was he actually guilty of an absurdity? With such a speech to make, ought he to have addressed himself exclusively to the body? Nay; he was more candid, rather than more ignorant, than the great mass of sensualists. Our accusation against men in general is, that they have made themselves all body. Through the corruption of human nature, and through the habits and practices of unrighteousness, the soul is so debased, and so surrenders the ascendancy to the flesh, that man becomes as literally a mere animal, living only to gratify animal propensities, and looking not beyond the present scene of being, as though the immortal principle were extinguished, in place of dormant, and death were to be annihilation. We want to know whether, with the great body of unconverted men, it would virtually make much perceptible difference if they had no souls. What is there in their conduct which indicates the workings of an inextinguishable principle? Or what is there which would necessarily be much altered, if, in place of being inextinguishable, it were decreed of this principle, that it should be quenched at death? We do not mean to say, that there is not much to distinguish them from brutes, which have no souls; but what difference would it make if we left men their souls, but took away from those souls their immortality, and let them know that we had taken it? There might be a perceptible difference amongst certain of the more abandoned and dissolute of our species, over whom a degree of restraint is put forth by the secret consciousness that they are to be judged hereafter by God, and who would be all the more reckless and injurious if assured that they were not living under a retributive government. But we do not see that any great difference would be produced, except amongst the more depraved, by an established demonstration that the soul is not immortal. So that the rich sensualist was not far wrong in speaking to his soul, as though it had been his body. True, indeed, the soul could not literally eat, the soul could not literally drink; but the soul might have no taste, no relish for spiritual things, the whole man might be given up to carnal indulgences, and the soul might be in such subjection, such slavery to the flesh, as to think of nothing but how to multiply its gratifications or to increase their intenseness. And the case is thoroughly the same, when a man is not given up to mere animal pleasures. Look at one of our mere money makers, and what is it but the soul, the spiritual part, which cannot handle the gold, and which cannot be enriched by the gold—what is it but this which is intent upon accumulating the gold? Or, look at one of our ambitious men, and what is it but the soul, the spiritual part, which is eager for such honours as the world has to give? Or, look at one of our intellectual men, and is it not the soul which is engrossed with earthly science? In every case of an unconverted man, you will find that the soul has made itself the ally, the auxiliary of the flesh, surrendering what we may call its immortal tendencies, and altogether fastening itself upon some temporal good.

Then be not too hasty in charging the rich man in our parable with an absurd and palpable mistake. He was probably nearer the truth than he either designed or suspected. He only spake to his soul as though that soul had become sepulchred in the body, indifferent to other pleasures, and incapable of other pursuits, than such as could be shared in and through the instrumentality of the flesh. And this is more or less the case with every soul that has not been "renewed after the image of God." It is "of the earth, earthy;" its high, its ethereal qualities have departed; it cannot soar from this terrestrial scene; it can assert no citizenship with the invisible world; it can take no delight in anything but what is material and perishable; it is utterly insensible to the objects and attractions of the future, and is alive only to those of the present. Where, then, the mistake of speaking to it as though possessed of corporeal appetites and powers? Oh! it was a bitter reproof to himself, but it is a reproof whose accuracy may be vindicated to the very letter, when a voluptuary, who lived only to gratify his passions, said unto his soul—that soul which cannot feed on the "meat which perisheth," that soul which cannot taste of the wine of this earth—"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But be not too sure that practically you are not doing the very same thing yourselves; for this was no solitary case, seeing that Christ generalized it in the words of our text. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Next, let us point out to you that the very essence of idolatry is discoverable in this address of the rich man to his soul. It may justly be said that the rich man substituted his stores for God, put them in the place of God, or looked to them to do for him what God alone could do. It is through no mere figure of speech that covetousness is called idolatry. We suppose it to be the very pith and essence of idolatry, that a man looks to some other being than the true God for what God alone can bestow, thus investing that other being with powers and prerogatives which can belong strictly to none but the uncreated and the infinite. It is a matter of no moment what the thing is, or what the being may be, which is virtually substituted for God. Let there be only the substitution, so that there is a transfer of the affection and dependence, which are due to none but God, to that which is not God, and the idolatry is equally complete whether or not there be any molten image which is outwardly worshipped. If one of our great capitalists were to take ingots of gold and of silver, to deliver them into the hands of the statuary, and to command him to fashion them into an image, and if, when the command had been obeyed, he were to have the image set up in one of his chambers, and to accustom himself to bow before it, asking from it protection and looking to it for sustenance, why the whole world would, with one voice, pronounce him an idolator, declaring the title to be as justly bestowed, notwithstanding his Christian birth and profession, as on any of the heathen immersed in degrading superstition. And what we wish to know from you is, whether it is quite indispensable to the making good against this capitalist the charge of idolatry, that he should actually give the metal into the hands of an artificer, and then shrine the image in the recesses of his dwelling, and offer to it his morning and evening petitions. Suppose that, in place of having his gold wrought up into an image, he invests it in some bank, or some fund, of whose security he is thoroughly satisfied; and if, just because he has made this investment, he considers himself and his family amply provided for, secured against contingencies, or certain of abundance, what, we ask, is his investment but his god? Is he not looking to that investment to do for him what God alone can do, to supply his own wants and those of his children? And what practical difference is there between the gold in the investment and the gold in the image, if in both cases there be a confidence in the gold, as the source of those supplies which come from God alone?

And it is of idolatry as thus defined and exhibited that we at once convict the rich man in our parable. He felt thoroughly secured against want, not because of the unwearied benevolence and guardianship of God, but because his barns were about to be filled with all manner of store. He reckoned it a sufficient guarantee for his passing many years in affluence, that he had already in his possession so much of the material of abundant living as there was any likelihood of his being able to exhaust. Because he had in store a large quantity of the fruits of the earth, he evidently accounted himself independent upon God. In other words, he put his stock of provisions in the place of God, and trusted in that stock of provisions as able to do for him what God alone could do; and thus was he chargeable with idolatry, in the sense and on the principle which we have laid down in bringing home the accusation to the accumulators of our own day. Do you wonder, then, that his conduct was especially offensive to God, as offensive as though in spite of the very letter of the second commandment, he had fashioned an image and bowed down before it? We could earnestly wish that you were quite aware of the idolatry with which this sensualist was chargeable. He has a host of imitators, and perhaps hardly one is conscious of the imitation. Idolatry is so hard a word, and the mind so naturally presupposes for its commission all the symbols and externals of material superstition, that most men scarcely suspect that the land is now overrun with it, and still less that they themselves may be ranked with its practisers.

But we fasten you down to the simple proposition—a proposition, whose accuracy we challenge you to invalidate—that if a man trust in anything but God to do for him what God alone can do, that in which he trusts is his substitute for God, and therefore as much his idol, as though it had been prepared by the hands of the statuary. And a man is trusting in capital to do for him what God alone can do, if he reckon himself and his family provided for just because he has accumulated capital, or if he be eager to accumulate capital, as thinking that it will make sure this provision. There is many a man who would dismiss all fears of want, and conclude his children sure of a sufficiency, if he were only master of £10,000. consols; and all we can say of such a man is, that he puts £10,000. consols in the place of God, and is as thorough an idolator, as though he worshipped Baal or Ashtaroth. It is not that a man necessarily becomes an idolator, through becoming the possessor of capital. Capital may increase, but the man may not set his heart upon it; he may be just as simple in his dependance upon God, through the whole period and process of his accumulation, when his investments are large, as whilst the day's labour had to furnish the day's bread, and he had no superfluity to lay by for to-morrow. But if, as fast as he hoards, he considers himself more and more independent; if he be anxious to hoard with a view of being independent; if his confidence, as to the supply of his own future wants and those of his household, be in proportion to that which he has laid by, increasing therewith and diminishing therewith, then there is no parrying the charge of idolatry. Capital is to this man in the place of Divinity; and he is virtually saying to his soul, not as the Christian ought to say—'Soul, thou hast a never-failing Guardian, who will be sure to provide for thee through the shifting scenes of life,' but, as a worshipper of his own possessions might say—"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Yes, you might not have suspected that we should identify numbers in the present day with this rich sensualist, but the parallel must be very close, or Christ would not have said: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

But we do not suppose that we have even yet reached the extreme point of this rich man's offence. He must have greatly provoked God by his materialism, and probably still more by his idolatry, but it was to neither of these that God pointedly referred when he interfered in just judgment, and we therefore conclude that it was yet in another particular that the chief offence lay. And this particular seems to have been his reckoning on many years of life. If it had been his idolatry which had specially provoked retribution, it would probably have been on the immediate object of idolatry that vengeance would have descended. God might have said—'I will fatally blight thine harvest; I will utterly burn up thy crops: where then will be thy sustenance, where thy boasted security against want?' But the judgment is evidently directed against the insolent expectation of long life. The speech is virtually, 'Thou hast assumed, or taken for granted, that thou hast many years to live, utterly forgetful that the times of every man are in my hand, and for this I will instantly visit thee. "O fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee."' The rich man is called a fool, and is upbraided as a fool, on the ground of his having supposed himself quite sure of life; so that evidently the reckoning on the distance of death is given as what, more than anything else, had displeased God in his conduct. And there ought to be something very striking in this to all of us, at all times, and more especially to the young, who are prone to the concluding that death must be distant. We have no information as to the age of the man to whom our parable refers, but we must naturally infer, from the whole tenor of the narrative, that he was in the prime of his days, so that what are called the probabilities were in favour of his having yet many years to live. Had he already reached old age, and had he been still reckoning on lengthened life, his folly would be universally admitted and perhaps even universally reprobated. But if he were yet, as he would seem to have been, in the fulness of his strength, he only did that which the great mass of men are in the habit of doing, without much consciousness that they are doing what is specially offensive unto God.

And it ought to be received by us as a very impressive warning, that it was nothing but a practical forgetfulness of the uncertainty of life, which brought down a sudden judgment on the rich worldling whose history is before us. It is as though God could have borne yet longer with his voluptuousness, though he had actually confounded the material with the spiritual, and debased the soul into a mere slave of the flesh; it is as though God could have borne yet longer with his idolatry, though he had substituted his own storehouses for a presiding Deity, and given to the hoarded corn all the confidence which should have been given to an ever-active providence; but when he presumed to make sure of life, to reckon, not only that his goods would last many years, but that he should have many years in which to enjoy them, then it seems as if the provocation were complete, and vengeance could no longer be deferred. And there is evidently a peculiar invasion, as it were, of the prerogatives of God, whensoever a man calculates that death is yet distant. Life is that of which, even in appearance, no man can have a stock in hand. The life of to-morrow cannot be stored up to-day; though, in a certain sense, the supply of to-morrow's wants may be, supposing that we live till to-morrow. There is not, therefore, that shadow of an excuse for reckoning on the prolongation of life, which there may be for reckoning on a provision for its wants. The man who has a large stock of corn shows himself indeed unmindful of the supremacy of God, if he conclude that on that account he cannot live to be needy; but he is evidently vastly outdone by another, who, because he seems blessed with strong health, practically concludes that he shall not soon die. For this it was that the rich man perished. And the same may happen in regard to some amongst ourselves. Do you wish to shorten life? Make sure of its being prolonged. O, when I see how many are suddenly cut down in their prime, and when I remember how prone we are all to conclude that death cannot be at hand, the startling message in the parable forces itself upon the attention, and we cannot but fear that, where there has been a quick judgment, there may have been a hateful folly! It is altogether a startling reflection, that in all that variety of what we call "accidents," in the numberless cases of rapid and unexpected, and, in one sense, untimely dissolution, there may be workings of that retributive judgment of which the parable before us records so striking an exercise. The man may have virtually destroyed himself. That one person over whom a neighbourhood is lamenting, whose premature death is the subject of general conversation and regret, may have fallen through his own presumption. He had confidence that he had years to live, therefore God would not suffer him to live moments. We want very much to press this on your consideration. Every man who is not labouring earnestly to save the soul is reckoning on long life. We care not whether or not he acknowledge this to others, we care not whether or not he acknowledge it to himself: he may profess a thorough belief in the uncertainty of life, but the fact is, that he makes sure of life, and the proof is that he takes no pains to secure his salvation. And the fearful thing is, that this very reckoning upon life, which men would hardly perhaps think of counting amongst their sins, may be the most offensive part of their conduct in the eye of the Almighty, and draw upon them the abbreviation of that life, and thus the loss of the expected opportunities of repentance and amendment. A man determines that he will take a little more pleasure, or accumulate a little more wealth, before attending to the high duties of religion. Now, the great provocation may not be, as you might at first suppose, in the preference of worldly pleasure or worldly wealth to what is celestial and enduring; it may lie in concluding that he shall have the time in which to eat, or to drink, or to gather in money. God did not strike down the rich man whose history is before us, so much because he was a sensualist, as because he was a fool—a fool in making sure of life when there was nothing to assure him, and in reckoning on life as a fixed term when it is only held from moment to moment. Oh! how easy to overlook this! how easy to keep out of sight the sin of reckoning upon life, whilst we are quite aware of the sin of mis-spending life! The absurdity of reckoning upon life, in spite of the continued demonstrations of its uncertainty, is a common and favourite topic of discourse; but we are now upon the sinfulness, a sinfulness which is quite independent on the way in which life might be spent; for the righteous man, as well as the unrighteous, may practically take for granted that he has many years to live, and if he do it is not his righteousness in other particulars which will take away the sinfulness from his presumptuous calculation. There is an expression in the verse preceding our text which sets this sinfulness in a clear and strong light: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." 'Thy soul shall be demanded back.' It is but a lent thing, given for a time into thy keeping, but only in such a sense as to be liable at a moment's notice to recall. Who of us habitually considers the soul as only a loan entrusted for a while to his keeping, to be surrendered up, like any other deposit, whenever demanded, but not without a strict account as to the manner in which it has been used? The soul is not thine own. Thou dost act as if it were thine own—thine own to neglect, thine own to abuse, thine own to throw away. But it is not thine own. Fool! to trifle with the property of another, and that other the ever-living God.

My brethren, there are so many practical considerations pressed upon us by the message to the rich man in our parable, that we hardly know how to give each its due place. The sinfulness of reckoning upon life, which perhaps all of us may more or less be accused of; the possible suddenness of the retribution—"this night;"—ah! it may be so, that before another sun rise some of us whose plans are arranged on the supposition that there is yet much sand in the glass, shall have solved the mysterious problem and ascertained what it is to die;—the character ascribed to the soul of being only a loan,—all these particulars are so full and impressive that each might furnish a matter for a separate discourse.

But we must draw to a close; and consider carefully our text. Are you "rich toward God?" Is your treasure above? If not, then it is the verdict of the Lord Jesus himself, that you closely resemble the rich sensualist of the parable. "So is he" of the same kind, of the same stuff, "so is he"—whatsoever and whosoever he be—who "layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

And of what avail is it, men of business! that ye "rise up early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness?" For whom are you accumulating? For children? for heirs? for friends? Ah! be not too sure. "Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Biting question! "He heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them." Take one general rule: a family is never permanently benefitted by riches obtained through fraud, or hoarded through covetousness. There goes no blessing with such wealth—it is utterly cankered; and the large fortune, as it is called, entails commonly wretchedness on the family—as its history, if duly traced, would too faithfully attest. Provide not, then, for children, by endangering your own souls. It is no provision but a provision of wrath. You lay up bankruptcy and confusion, though you lay up in unquestioned securities. Whereas, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and you cannot leave your family destitute, for you will bequeath it the Divine blessing—you cannot leave it friendless, for you ensure it the Divine protection.

THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SACRIFICES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, MARCH 18, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. And he did as the Lord commanded Moses."—Leviticus xvi. 34.

THAT the law had a shadow of things to come, and that the substance was Christ, is a point universally admitted by all who acknowledge the inspiration of the New Testament. The unhesitating manner in which the apostles applied to the offering up of Christ the various sacrificial terms of the Jewish ritual; the labour bestowed, for example, in the Epistle to the Hebrews on showing the significance of legal observances when viewed in their reference to the Mediator; these, if the authority of Scripture be admitted, compel us to acknowledge that between the temple sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ there exists a relationship of a type to its antitype; and when once that relation is admitted, it becomes a great point to ascertain the sense in which legal sacrifices took away sins; for, of course, this sense must determine that in which the sacrifice of Christ made atonement for transgressions. Hence there is nothing on which Unitarian writers have bestowed more labour than on the endeavour to invalidate the propitiatory nature of the Mosaic sacrifices. They have seen clearly enough that if they could succeed in demonstating that the sacrifices under the law were not expiatory —in other words, that they were not efficacious in the removing guilt and obtaining pardon, they would have made a long advance towards establishing their favourite theory, that Christ died only to set an example and to confirm his doctrine, and not as a sin offering for a fallen creation. The relationship of type, and antitype being admitted, whatever proved that there was no propitiatory virtue in the type would go far towards proving that there was none in the antitype. On the other hand, if it be shown that under the law the suffering of animals was taken as a substitute for the punishment of offenders, so that in virtue of those sufferings the sinner was released, we shall possess an almost irrefragable demonstration that Christ died as a real sacrifice for sin, and that through the energies of such sacrifice forgiveness is now attainable by man. And nothing apparently can be more expressive than the language of our text. It is declared that the priest should make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins. You will not be easily persuaded that these words mean aught else than that in consequence of the atonement, the congregation would be transferred from a position of condemnation to one of pardon, so that an expiatory power, no matter whence derived, must have resided in the atonement. We believe that, whatever the cases in which the atonement is said to have been made, there is none in which the notion of reconciliation as a consequence of what is offered, or done, may not be distinctly traced; and if atonement always mark reconciliation, then when the atonement is made by sacrifice, and the reconciliation is that of the Creator towards his sinful creatures, we seem warranted in saying that the sacrifice must be propitiatory.

We will now, however, turn to the chapter from which the text is taken, and examine that great legal observance with whose details it is occupied. We feel it our duty to endeavour, God willing, to assist you in keeping the solemnities of Passion Week, through which we are passing; and we do not know that any subject of discourse could be better adapted to such an object than one which shall show you the sacrifice of Christ in the figures of the law. The chapter before us relates to what is ordinarily termed the great day of atonement or expiation, the tenth day of the month Tisri, which was amongst the Jews the first month of the civil year; and the fast held on this day was named the great fast, or simply the fast, not only because the people fasted all the day long, but because no other fast was actually enjoined by the law. Give us your patient attention whilst we endeavour in the first place to take a brief survey of the services of the great day of atonement; in the second place, to show that the sacrifices then offered were strictly propitiatory; and in the third place, to trace the correspondence between this annual expiation under the law, and that one great expiation which the church in a few days will especially commemorate.

I. Now the chief services of the day of atonement—for it would be beside our purpose to enumerate them all—were these: the high priest having purified himself by sundry ceremonial observances, and offered up a bullock as a sin-offering for himself and his house, cast lots upon two goats, the one to be sacrificed, and the other to be sent into the desert. Having slain the first goat on the altar, he carried its blood into the holy of holies, and sprinkled the mercy-seat therewith, and then returned to lay his hands on the head of the second goat, denominated the scape-goat, to confess over him the iniquities of the people, and to send him away into the wilderness. Of this scape-goat it is expressly said, "He shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land not inhabited." Such were those observances of the great day of atonement on which we wish to comment; the minor and less significant we purposely omit.

II. Now, then, let us inquire whether the sacrifices were strictly propitiatory; whether, that is, the atonement spoken of in our text was not precisely what is meant by atonement in orthodox Christianity. In order to the rightly answering this question, it is important that you should observe, that the two goats are spoken of throughout the chapter as together constituting the sin-offering; so that the ceremony of the scape-goat was not a distinct ceremony, but rather a continuance and consummation of the sin-offering. And when you consider the two goats as together constituting the sin-offering, you must receive as the only satisfactory account of the transaction that which sets forth the scape-goat as exhibiting the effects of the expiation which was represented by the death of the other. The sins of the people were laid upon the head of the scape-goat and borne away to the wilderness; but this scape-goat was a part of the sin-offering, and therefore by combining the parts of the sin-offering, you have before you both the means and the effect: you have the means, the shedding of blood without which there is no remission; you have the effect, the removal of guilt, so that iniquity, though searched for, can no where be found. This, we think, the only fair and legitimate account. One animal could not have exhibited both the means employed and the effect produced; hence two are united in the sin-offering: the first makes the typical expiation; the second exhibits the consequences or results; and the question, therefore, now before us is, whether the sacrifice thus offered was not strictly propitiatory, whether the victims were not symbolically a substitute for the people. The ceremony of the imposition of hands is to our minds quite conclusive on this point. Nothing can be more conclusive than this ceremony, as you find it recorded in the chapter before us: "Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat." You can attach, we think, no sufficient meaning to these words, unless you admit that the sins of the people were actually transferred to the sin-offering. We do not forget, when we speak of the transfer as actual, that it could not at most, have been other than typical; but we are not at present concerned with observing from whence the virtue was derived, but only with the fact that there was virtue in the rite—virtue that prevailed to the removal of guilt; and that guilt was actually removed, we conclude, as we have just said, from the imposition of hands. All the transgressions of the people are said to have been put upon the head of the goat, and borne away by the goat into a land not inhabited. Over and above these express statements—statements which seem wholly unintelligible, unless we allow the actual, though symbolical, transfer of sin from the people to the victim—you will observe, that the goat thus sent into the wilderness was to be considered as a polluted one. The man who took it became thereby unclean, and was not allowed to return into the camp until he performed certain legal purifications. Why was the goat which had been led up to the temple and been counted clean—since otherwise it could not have been made a sin-offering—why was this now alone so impure that its very touch was defilement? We can give no answer but that the transgressions of the people had been actually laid upon the goat as a substitute; and, therefore, as the goat went away into the desert, it went away laden with iniquity, so that what in itself had been pure and unblemished became by the transferred defilement of the sinner so fearfully polluted that the least contact with it communicated ceremonial uncleanness.

It seems certain that such was the view entertained by the Jews, who were wont to treat the scape-goat as actually an accursed thing. Though not commanded by the law, they used to maltreat the goat Azazel—for by this name was the scape-goat known—to spit upon him, and pluck off his hair. Thus they acted towards the goat as they acted towards Christ, who in a truer sense than the Azazel, was "made sin for us." And if further proof were needed of the idea which the Jews themselves attached to the ceremony of the imposition of hands on the head of the victim, it is to be found in the forms of confession which their writers have transmitted ,as used ordinarily in expiatory sacrifices. It appears, for example, that when an individual presented his own sacrifice, he laid his hands on the head of the offering, saying amongst other things, "Let this victim be my expiation"—words which were universally considered equivalent to an entreaty that evils which ought in justice to have alighted upon the offender might fall upon the sacrifice. And it is every way worthy of note, as marking the traditional idea of the great day of expiation, that the modern Jews, as well as the ancient, hold fast the notion of a strict propitiatory atonement. In observing this day, they commonly substitute a bird for the prescribed legal victims, but use words and actions which are singularly significant. Thus the master of the family pronounces over the bird such words as these: "Let this bird be a substitute for me; let it come into my place; let it be an expiation for me; let death be allotted to this bird, but to me and all Israel a happy life." The bird is then consumed with fire, but the entrails to which sin, as being an inward thing, is supposed to have been transferred by implication, are exposed on the house-top, in order that they may be carried away by birds of prey, just as the scape-goat of old bore away the sins of the people into the wilderness. The same thing has been observed among the heathen; and let not the witness of heathenism be rejected as worthless, for natural religion, as it exists in the world, is in a great measure derived from tradition. Even amongst the heathen, the practice was common of imprecating on the head of the victim evils which the sacrificer wished to avert from himself. We think, then, that we attach nothing more to the imposition of hands than is warranted by the words of Scripture and the witness of antiquity, when we regard it as a symbolical transfer of sins from the offerer to the sacrifice; and this being admitted, we are possessed of a clear demonstration that the services of the great day of atonement were strictly propitiatory. There was the substitution of a victim in the stead of the transgressors; and there was the taking away of guilt in virtue of the expiation. The sanctions of the law which required the sacrifice were indeed only temporal, and of course, therefore, the penalty remitted must also have been temporal; but it is enough for our argument that there was remission of penalty, for this establishes the fact that the sacrifices themselves were propitiatory. When we see the scape-goat hurried away to the wilderness laden with translated guilt, so as to be made an accursed thing, then, whatever the source whence the virtue is derived, and whatever the amount of remitted penalty, we have before us an exhibition which ought to satisfy us of the expiatory nature of legal offering, and to convince us that sin under the law, as we are wont to declare of sin under the gospel, was literally transferred from the sinner to the sacrifice; and being thus transferred, was so removed and done away, that the offender obtained full pardon for the offence. Where, then, can be the ground for doubting, that by "atonement," in our text, is to be understood what we understand by it in Christian phraseology, that there was effected a real removal of guilt and its consequences from the Jewish transgressor, when on the great and solemn day of expiation, in compliance with a divine statute an atonement was made for the children of Israel for all their sins once every year.

III. And here we bring you back to the main argument we have all along had in hand—the inferring from the character of the legal sacrifice that of the Christian. If you can once show that the sacrifices of the law typify the sacrifice of Christ, and that the sacrifices of the law were strictly propitiatory, it follows as an irresistible deduction—notwithstanding the cavils, objections, and theories of philosophising sects—that the Lamb of God died truly as a sin-offering making by his death atonement for the world. Indeed, if no reference were made to the Old Testament, the language of the New is so clear and explicit that nothing but the most determined prepossession could fail to find in it the doctrine that Christ's death was a propitiatory sacrifice. But the connection between the two dispensations, and, therefore, the two Testaments, is so strict in every point, that it were no just examination of the gospel which would keep the law out of sight. Therefore, we come to examine more definitely the correspondence between the sacrifice of the Saviour and those which have just been reviewed. There can be little doubt that the high priest himself was on this solemn occasion a special type of the Redeemer, for Christ was not only the victim presented in the sacrifice, he was also the priest who presented it; he offered himself. So that we might expect, and on inquiry shall find, typical allusions and observances which were personal to Aaron and his sons. We have not, however, dwelt on such observances, and shall not, therefore, now enlarge on their figurative import. I would only point out two particulars in which what was commanded to the high priest bore, as it should seem, a typical relation to Christ. The high priest was to perform the services of the great day of expiation in the mean garments of the ordinary priests, and not in the rich robes which were peculiar to his own office. This has reference to the humiliation of the Redeemer. It was not in that glory which belonged to him as God that the

Second Person in the Trinity wrought out our deliverance. He divested himself of this glory; he did not, indeed he could not, lay aside any of the attributes of Godhead. He was as truly, as actively, God, the well-spring of life to every creature in all the districts of immensity, while circumscribed in the flesh, and walking the narrow stage of this earth in the fashion of a man, as, when throned in the majesty of eternity, he created the universe, and breathed animation through all its departments. The only thing of which he could divest himself was the apparent form of God—the outward manifestation of the powers and splendours of the Divine nature. He exchanged, in short, the form of God for the form of man. Just as the high priest exchanged the robe of beauty and richness for the mean linen garment—but the change was only in the robe—the high priest was equally a high priest, the same in his powers, functions, and dignities: thus with Christ—the change was only in the form, the appearance, the display—Deity was equally Deity, the same in omniscience, in omnipotence, in all those properties which immeasurably separate the Infinite Being from all finite. Then, again, we observe, that when the high priest entered within the veil, carrying the blood with which to sprinkle the mercy-seat, it was expressly commanded that there should be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation. In the mysterious silence and loneliness thus enjoined whilst the work of intercession went forward, there is a voice which the least heedful amongst you can scarce fail to hear. Solitary, and with none even of the priests as assistants, he who typified Messiah passed into the holiest, and made atonement for himself, his household, and all the congregation: and thus the High Priest of our profession "trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was to be none;" no man was in the tabernacle when he entered by his own blood into the holy place. And now, if we would have a share in the benefits of his intercession, above all things, we are to take heed that we attempt not to compound the human with the Divine. Christ was alone; he needed not an assistant, and he allows not a rival. If we will commit simply into his hands the business of our salvation, he will carry it through, and so sprinkle the mercy-seat, that there shall be liberty of approach unto God whilst we remain upon earth, and admission into his presence when delivered from the flesh; but if there be any hearkening to the suggestions of pride, any adherence to systems of spurious theology which would make man a half-worker with God in the achievement of salvation, we attempt, in respect to the true High Priest what was so emphatically forbidden in respect to the typical—we send an intruder into the courts of the sanctuary, just when the Almighty had declared that the deep and awful silence must not be broken by any human foot tread; and all we can expect is that, having offended God by our assumption, we perish beneath his displeasure.

But though in these and in other respects, the high priest on the great day of atonement was an accurate figure of Christ, there can be no debate that the sin-offering then made was the chief typical representation of the Mediator. We wish you to recollect that this sin-offering was composed of two animals—the one slain, the other sent into the wilderness. It was naturally to be expected that there would be such a weakness and insufficiency in types, when the object represented was Christ, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," that they could be made accurate only by being combined. And it was on this account, we suppose, that the types were so multiplied. It is not that precisely the same thing is represented under a variety of emblems; it is rather that one portion of Christ's work, or one section of his offices, is especially delineated by one set of types, and another by another. No single figure could represent more than a fraction of those stupendous combinations of which he must be the subject who is made unto his church "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Creation might pour forth all its imagery, and yet leave the Mediatorial work imperfectly pourtrayed; and the combination of types was indispensable to completeness of delineation. In the case before us one goat was not sufficient to represent the sin-offering of Christ. The goat which was sacrificed did not return to life, and, therefore, however it might typify the expiation which Christ made when dying, it could show nothing of those consequences of expiation which Christ rose from the dead to carry forward on our behalf. Hence a second goat was introduced, not, as we have frequently remarked, as altogether a separate victim, but rather—for the weakness of the figures obliges us to use something like strangeness of speech—as part of the first victim; or, perhaps, still more strictly that first victim in a different and after-stage of the expiatory process. When you thus view the animals as together constituting one sin-offering, combining the dead and the living in the same delineation, you have brought before you such a representation of Christ as must commend itself to every man by its power and its faithfulness. As the true Azazel, the scape-goat of ruined Christians, bearing upon him the translated sins of the whole human family, Christ Jesus ascended the altar, yielded himself to the knife and the fire of justice, pouring out his blood, and scorched by those flames which otherwise must have enveloped the tribes of our race, he satisfied every claim which God had on man, and paid all that fearful outstanding of debt which an eternity of human anguish could only have increased. And it was not only that he was delivered for our offences; he must be raised again for our justification; he must live to plead the merits of his sacrifice, and to apply as an Intercessor what he effected as a propitiation; and, therefore, did the slain goat appear again, as it were, in the scape-goat. The very being on whom had been emptied the vials of God's righteous indignation against sin, who had gone down to the grave crushed beneath the weight of imputed transgression, that very being parted from death with a conqueror's might, and stood ready to bear into the broad wilderness the forgetfulness of the offences of all who should believe upon his name! Atoning efficacy had resided in the sacrifice which the first goat typified, but it would have been a demonstration that there was no sufficient efficacy had the victim seen corruption in the place of re-appearing fresh strung with animation. The life of Christ, as St. Paul says, is as necessary to our being saved as his death is to our being reconciled. The Mediatorial work consists in no single act, but rather extends itself in constant operations through all the ages which are to roam over this disorganized earth; intercession so perpetuates the crucifixion, that he who died once in agony and shame, dies ever in the fresh presentation of that blood which can alone wash away our fast recurring stains. Hence, there must be a second goat to make up the typical sin-offering. That goat, though an integral part of the sin-offering, is not to be put to death, but is to carry away, so that they may no where be found, those transgressions for which expiation has been made by the first, and thus to make effectual to the congregation the propitiatory virtues of the blood which had been shed. As then, the first goat was Christ offering himself without spot unto the Father so the second was Christ "the resurrection and the life" applying the energies of his death to the removal of guilt from his people. There needs nothing but that we confess in faith our iniquities over "him who died, the just for the unjust," and lay our transgression on his head as he passes from the fearful scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, and the living Mediator by a resistless application of the might of his atonement, will so sweep away the remembrance of our misdoings, that in the emphatic language of Holy Writ, "they shall be cast behind God's back and be buried in the depths of the sea." This is the beautiful and blessed result which the whole tenour of Scripture warrants our ascribing to Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. There is not only forgiveness, there is forgetfulnes of our sins—they are carried to the desert and can nowhere be found. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my name's sake, and will not remember thy sins." He who takes Christ as his propitiation, stands before God not merely as a man who is pardoned—that were much, and more than angel tongue can tell—but as a man who has never offended. This is an immeasurably greater thing. My sins may be forgiven, and yet I may still feel as a criminal in the presence of God; let them be forgotten—this they never can be with man: man may forgive, but he cannot forget; it is God only that can both forgive and forget—let sins be forgotten, and there is no room for suspicion, even in the most timid or downcast, that God looks on him with any eye but that of a Father, with an affection that can never be estranged, and never be weakened. Thus the symbolical representation of the great day of atonement extends itself over the whole breadth of Christian privilege. Sin forgiven, sin forgotten—these were the things typified by the slaying of one of the goats and the sending the other into the wilderness; sin forgiven, and sin forgotten—these, blessed be God! are the results obtained for us by the crucifixion and intercession of "the one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." May we not well, then, declare that the words originally applied to the day of expiation under the law belong in all their force to the day of awful commemoration which is rapidly approaching—the day on which, amid the trembling earth and the darkening sky, we are to behold the Lamb of God hanging on the tree—and the words which assert, "And this shall be an everlasting statute." "On that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord."

Yes, my brethren, we are soon to gather round the cross of our Redeemer, and to give in our allegiance to him who is at once the High Priest and the victim. We shall mark the infidel Jews, treating with scorn and loathing and execration the Azazel on whom are laid the iniquities of Adam and his seed; "he is despised and rejected of men, wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." We behold him lifted up an ignominious spectacle, reviled by men, and—for a small moment—forsaken of God; creation sympathizes with a suffering Creator; the very sun puts on sackcloth, and the rocks tremble as though quickened into agony by the awfulness of the scene! He dies; but his death destroys death! He falls; but it is the fall of the foundation stone which grinds into powder as it descends in its stupendousness the sovereignty of Satan, the despotism of evil! Are we ready, man, woman, child—are we ready to transfer to this Azazel—that he may thus carry our iniquities with him through the dark valley, that he may hurl them into the unfathomable abyss; are we ready to transfer to him the countless misdoings of our lives, to lay our hands upon his head, and to say, "Be thou my expiation?" If not done before, it may be done now. Now, this moment, we may believe upon Christ; faith shall effect the translation of guilt; and they who came up to God's house with a burden of unforgiven sin, may depart with that burden removed and annihilated, for the scape-goat shall have borne it into the waste of oblivion, and justice have pronounced that there is no condemnation. "God hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Observe and rejoice in the double transfer—a transfer effected wherever there is true faith in Christ. Our sins are imputed to the Redeemer, and the Redeemer's righteousness is imputed to us. Oh, that the Passion Week which is now in progress, and for whose tremendous solemnities we endeavour to prepare you, by leading you back to the legal sacrifices, and there showing you in complicated types the victim and the work on which the Christian's hope rests. Oh! that this Passion Week might be a season during which, from among this congregation, Christ may "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied!" Is this week to come round with all its teaching, all its awful remembrances, and yet find consciences which have never been stirred, and hearts which have never been softened "by the agony and bloody sweat, by the cross and passion, by the precious death and burial" of the incarnate God? Alas! alas! that it should be so. And dare we doubt that it is? There are yet some of you—nay, it may be there are many—whose Christianity is only nominal, who are still the servants of sin, whose thoughts are on their honours or their pleasures, rather than on the undying soul and the boundless hereafter. Well, my brethren, what are we to say to such? Shall we endeavour to move them by earnest delineations of their ingratitude, their madness, their danger? Nay, not exactly so. This is hardly the season at which we should strive to move them by pathetic speech, or cogent argument, or impassioned appeal; this is rather the season at which most especially Christ himself is to preach. What is the sermon? Hear it, and prove not yourselves harder than the rock, which shuddered at the homily, by hearing it unmoved. It is a sermon against sin. What! can sin be a thing to trifle with, when its pardon could be gained by nothing less than the death of God's only and well beloved Son? It is a sermon which tells in burning words of everlasting punishment. There is no description of hell which gives so tremendous a view of God's wrath as the description of the crucifixion. But is this all? Is it only of tribulation and vengeance that the sermon is eloquent which Christ utters from the cross? Oh! not so. It is a sermon which breathes of hope, glows with love, and is rich, inexhaustibly rich, in encouragement. Its words, pronounced in the name of the living God, are words such as these: "I have laid help upon one who is mighty." "I have found a ransom." May God give us all the hearing ear and the feeling heart, that we turn not away from him who thus speaks; but rather, learning at once what sin is, and how alone it can be pardoned, may abjure its service and embrace its atonement!

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, MARCH 25, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter."—Acts xvii. 32.

SUCH was the reception which the philosophical Athenians gave to the great doctrine which our church at this season more especially commemorates. The utmost which the doctrine could gain, you see, was that some would be ready to give it another audience; but on the part, probably, of the great majority of the hearers, its mention was treated with undisguised scorn and contempt. In short, "the resurrection of the dead" was regarded as incredible, which was exactly the aspect under which St. Paul had elsewhere found it considered, for he says in his address before Agrippa: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" But is there any sufficient reason for this treatment? Is there anything in the doctrine of the resurrection itself, or in the evidence on which it rests, to justify this scepticism, and to excuse the Athenians for treating it as they did? We will make it our business on the present occasion to endeavour simply to answer these questions. In the earlier days of Christianity, there seems to have been the same readiness to cavil and object as in our own. Heresy is no modern thing, though it may have grown into greater strength as fostered by successive generations. With respect to the resurrection of the dead, it is evident, that men formerly, as well as now, were disposed to regard it with wonder and incredulity. We learn from that famous chapter, the 15th of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, that some even of those who professedly belonged to the church went the length of maintaining, that there is no resurrection. "How," asks the apostle, "say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?" It appears, yet further, that others endeavoured to explain away what was asserted of the resurrection, fastening, perhaps, a spiritual interpretation on that which in fairness could bear only a literal. This was probably the case with Hymenæus and Philetus, of whom we are told, that they "erred concerning the truth, saying, that the resurrection was passed already." They may have taught, that the only resurrection is that moral one which takes place when man emerges from the death of trespasses and sins; and thus have given up the body to the lasting dishonours of the grave. St. Paul marks strongly his abhorrence of this endeavour to spiritualize the resurrection, by declaring of such teachers, that "their word would eat as doth a canker." And when there was no holding of false doctrine, there was great inquisitiveness as to the details of the resurrection. Satisfied on the fact that the dead will be raised, curiosity prompted questions as to the bodies in which the buried will re-appear. Hence St. Paul, in the chapter to which we have referred, after combating the falsehood, that there is no resurrection, turns himself not to the gratifying, nor yet altogether to the repressing, the curiosity which sought to pry into all the mysteries of a resurrection. He does not endeavour, and perhaps it would not have been possible, to explain with accuracy the nature and the powers of the bodies in which men shall rise; but he gives certain broad and distinguishing features, which should have sufficed for every inquirer who sought for information which might be of practical worth. It cannot, then, be unseasonable, if we take advantage of the opportunity presented by the recurrence of Easter, and gather into one discourse the chief things which may be ascertained in regard of the body's resurrection. There are three ways in which we shall endeavour to meet the charge of incredible or absurd which the mockery of the Athenians brought against the resurrection, whether individually of Christ, or generally of all men.

In the first place, we shall consider the resurrection itself; secondly, the evidence on which it rests; thirdly, the details which Scripture gives as to the bodies in which man shall re-appear. Under each and all of these divisions we think to show you that, there is no ground whatsoever for the conduct of the Athenians, as recorded in the text: "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter."

I. Now, you should observe, that the resurrection is exhibited in the Bible, not as a speculative truth which must be believed because taught, but with which otherwise we have no close concern;—it is rather set forth as so intimately bound up with our salvation, that to prove it false were to prove the human race unredeemed. "If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." It is not, then, necessary to adduce proofs from revelation, that the dead are to rise, seeing that it is expressly declared, that unless they rose, the whole system of Christianity would be reduced into a fable. The question is not so much whether the Bible teaches, that there will be a resurrection, for this is admitted on all hands, but whether there lie such objections against the possibility of a resurrection as make it incredible, and thus justify us in rejecting the testimony of Scripture. But, then, you are to observe, that nothing short of distinct and direct impossibility would bear us out in such rejection, or in receiving the bare mention of the doctrine with the derision with which the Athenians received it. It is not the greatness of the achievement, the fact of its hopelessly surpassing all finite ability, which will warrant our questioning whether there could come a resurrection. The single point is, can we prove that a resurrection lies beyond the limit of possibility; that the effecting it lies beyond the power of the Redeemer? If we are not prepared with such a proof, it is childish to argue against a resurrection from its difficulty. A difficulty not clearly great enough to baffle God himself, is not too great to be overcome by the agency which we suppose introduced, and therefore furnishes no argument against the truth of the doctrine which is under debate. If the Bible had affirmed, that there should be a resurrection of all men, and then had ascribed to a finite agency the effecting this resurrection, we think that reason might fairly have argued, that the disproportion between the thing done and the doer, furnished ground enough for rejecting the whole statement as untrue. It will, indeed, be an amazing act, almost too great for thought, that which summons back into being the countless myriads of our race, and re-animates the dust which hath ever been human. That there should be an observant eye on every particle which hath appertained to man; that the individual particles should be kept distinct, in order that they may go hereafter to the constitution of that very person which they helped to constitute here; and that at last each man shall stand forth upon the earth with his own bone, and sinew, and flesh—we confess, that there is a wonderfulness in all this, which is completely overwhelming, and that the required knowledge and power can be looked for in none other but the Omniscient and the Omnipotent. But will any one say of a general resurrection, that it exceeds the capabilities of him who is to achieve it? Take what view you will of the difficulties of a resurrection, can you declare of them that they are palpably greater than God himself is able to overcome? The whole gist of the question lies in this. The difficulties are to be considered relatively to the agent; and it is only so far as the Divine power can be proved inadequate to the work, that the magnitude can be admitted as an argument against the performance; and, certainly, with every confession of the stupendousness of a resurrection, allowing that if referred to any finite ability it might rightly be called impossible, we cannot see why the work should be reckoned too great for God, unless we are prepared to say the same of other works which are confessedly his. Marvellously great as I feel the achievement to be of summoning forth the dead, and re-uniting each human soul to that identical body which enclosed it during the years of its probation, yet the moment you refer this achievement to the Creator, I lose all hesitation as to admitting its possibility. I look out on the wondrous exhibitions of creative wisdom and might, and I gather from the magnificent spectacle witness in abundance, that a resurrection is possible. It is possible for that Being, who cannot be perplexed by multiplicity of concerns, nay, if he be Omniscient, must take cognizance of each atom of dust as well as of every planet and every star; and why should he be unable to distinguish what hath belonged to man, and to appopriate to each individual his own? Shall I, then, hesitate to tell the objector who would dwell on the dissolution of humanity, on the difficulty of collecting again the elements which have been scattered to the winds or strewn on the waters, and thus strive by enlarging on the wonderfulness, to throw doubt on the fact of a resurrection—shall I hesitate to tell him that the whole of nature is eloquent in his condemnation? Yes, ye proud and philosophizing Athenians! whether ye ridicule the doctrine as utterly beneath your regard, or condescend to vouchsafe it a second audience, as just coming within the line of what is possible, we can array the visible universe against your scepticism; we can declare that every star which walks the heavens is our witness, and that every insect which floats in the breeze is our witness, and that every breath which man draws is our witness, that the graves of this our earth may yet pour out their population; and reason concurs with revelation, and decides on the utter injustice of the scorn of the one class, and of the utter groundlessness of the hesitation of the other, as expressed in this account of the result of St. Paul's preaching at Athens: "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter."

II. Now up to this point we have simply laboured to prove to you, that there is nothing in the resúrrection which can fairly be considered as placing it beyond the power of God. Our only object has been to show, that since it is God who has raised the dead, an agency is assigned quite adequate to the work, and the work itself therefore comes within the range of credibility. But we are now, in the second place, to try to show you, that the doctrine of the resurrection rests on sufficient evidence, so that it ought not to be met either with the mockery which its mention drew from the one part of the Athenians, or with the hesitation which was all that it could gain from the other. We mean by evidence, the evidence which we have of the resurrection of Christ; for our own resurrection is so connected with his, that, as matters of fact, the two must stand or fall together.

Let us consider, then, the evidence which we have of the resurrection of Christ. And let it be remembered, that it was not in peaceful and sunny days that the apostles of Christ rose up to preach his resurrection. We think it impossible, without violence to every confessed principle of our nature, to harbour the opinion that the apostles were impostors, engaged in the wilful propagation of a lie. Before you can make good, not merely the charge, but the bare suspicion of imposture, you must exhibit some plausible or possible motive under whose influence you can fairly bring these men, whilst braving persecution. We all know enough of the weakness of man's heart, to know that where there is voluntary, and still more, cheerful submission to trouble and pain, there must be some great object kept in sight, the hope of whose attainment counterpoises the grief they encountered in its pursuit. To imagine that men will readily undergo persecution when they might easily avoid it, and that all the while there is no mighty principle, by appealing to which they are sustained amid the strife of affliction, is nothing less than imagining effects without causes; and we pause not in our argument to debate with those who would maintain a position so irrational. We are reduced, then, to the simple inquiry, whether sufficient motive could be assigned for the apostles' braving persecution in its most terrible shapes, in order that they might propagate what they knew to be falsehood. And we must be at liberty to suppose, that the motives which might induce a man now-a-days to keep up an imposition, must have been those which operated upon the apostles, if they proclaimed the resurrection, when aware that it was a fiction. But who would now undertake the advocacy of falsehood, if, instead of there existing a chance of his being a gainer, there existed a certainty of his being a loser? Yet this is precisely what the apostles did, if indeed they were deceivers. Who would be the champion of a lie, when stripes, and imprisonment, and famine, and torture, were to be the only boon in this life for braving God's anger in the next life? The supposition is altogether untenable; and therefore, unless you can show, which is absurd, that the apostles were not "men of like passions with ourselves," so that they were to be wrought upon by motives the very opposite of those which wield the most influence now, it would be utterly impossible to uphold the opinion, that there was a known propagation of a lie, when there was no doubt that the maintenance of a falsehood would be quickly followed by the rack and by the fire. And we gain a great point, when we establish, that the apostles could not have been deceivers. The instant you allow their honesty of intention, we have only to examine their means of information. It is making a vast advance to suppose, that the apostles must themselves have believed in the resurrection of their Master. We have only then to decide whether their belief rested on sufficient proof, or whether they lie open to a charge of credulity; we have only to see that to those witnesses who were chosen of God, God allowed such a demonstration as admitted not the possibility of a mistake. They were perfectly familiar with the person of Christ, inasmuch as, during the greater part of his ministry they had been his constant attendants. They were allowed frequent opportunites of seeing and conversing with him, during the forty days which elapsed between his resurrection and ascension. Hence, therefore, it is utterly insupposable that they should have received as their master, one who was not their master. The length of their previous acquaintance, and the ample means of after identification, concurred to secure them against taking a person for Christ who was not actually Christ. If they had known but little of our Lord during his life-time, or if they had seen but little of him after his resurrection, we might question their competence as witnesses that the very person who was buried had been raised from the grave. There exists, however, no place for such questioning, when their long attendance upon Christ must have given them infallible knowledge of his person, and their frequent intercourse with him previous to his ascension must have allowed of their assuring themselves of the sameness of his person. And thus, as we have before shown you that they could not have been deceivers, we seem now satisfactorily to have proved, that they could not have been deceived. We contend, therefore, that the testimony of these witnesses has all the moral weight which testimony can, in fairness, be required to possess. If they could neither have been deceivers nor deceived, we prove, with a kind of mathematical precision, that they must have been men rightly intentioned and rightly informed. And when you add to this, that the number of these witnesses is greater than is required by any law for the establishment of a matter in a court of assize, we think we have so vindicated their testimony to a resurrection, that it can be set aside by nothing but an obstinacy which will not, or an infatuation which cannot, be convinced. Having shown you, that the chosen witnesses proved by their endurances that they were not deceivers, and that they enjoyed such opportunities of assurance, that they could not themselves have been deceived, we seem to place the resurrection of our Lord, so far as testimony is concerned, beyond the reach of cavil; and whilst so noble a company, whose integrity we challenge you to impeach, and whose means of ascertaining truth we defy you to overrate, presses forward with the joyful exclamation, "The Lord is risen, the Lord is risen indeed"—oh! it is not because the philosophical Athenians received the doctrine, some with contempt, and others with coldness, that we look doubtingly on the grand article of the Christian faith. We feel that it was a scorn which nothing could justify, and a hesitation which must yield, so soon as evidence was examined, when we find it expressed in the words of our text—"When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter."

III. And now we wish to turn to certain of the details which Scripture gives in reference to the resurrection of the body; not with either the desire, or the hope, of gratifying curiosity, but simply that you may see that they are words only of soberness, and certainly afford no ground for the supposition that the doctrine itself is incredible. Now, the grand characteristic of our resurrection bodies is to be likeness to the glorified body of Christ, seeing that St. Paul declares of the Saviour, "He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body;" and there is every reason for concluding that Christ, when transfigured on the Mount, appeared in that glorified humanity in which he now sits at the Father's right hand. Referring to what he was then privileged to behold, St. Peter speaks of himself as an eye-witness of Christ's majesty; thus implying, that the form which the Saviour assumed was that which he wears in his state of exaltation. And if Christ, when transfigured, exhibited humanity in its glorified condition, we learn that our bodies, though made wondrously radiant, shall be distinguished as now, the one from the other, by their characteristic features. The Saviour was not so altered as not to be known. The body of humiliation had been suddenly changed into the body of exaltation; but the disciples, however dazzled by the unwonted splendours, beheld the Master whom they loved and with whom they were familiar, in the Being whose "face shone as the sun," and whose "raiment was glistering." We, then, shall be changed, but not so changed as to interfere with recognition. The glories which shall be put on the body shall allow of our knowing and being known by our earthly associates. Thus the two states of being are to be most closely linked; and we shall rise from the dead, purified, indeed, and brilliant, and indestructible, but, nevertheless, each retaining so much of his own peculiar lineaments, that we shall not be a new rank of creatures, but strictly the old, remodelled and yet the same, transformed but not losing identity, the parent still recognized by the child, and the child still recognized by the parent. And if we would examine more minutely into the change which shall pass upon our bodies, enough is told us by St. Paul, in that chapter which is always read at the burial of the dead, to satisfy all but a presumptuous curiosity. "It is sown"—thus it is that he speaks of the body—"it is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption." "Sown in corruption." The principle of dissolution is in this frame-work of matter; and, whatever for a time its comeliness and vigour, it is the heir of death, and must "say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister." But "it is raised in incorruption." Each limb, as it were, shall be sinewed with eternity, and that which on earth might be worn down by suffering and wasted by disease, shall come forth from its resting-place, inaccessible to decay, imperishable, unchangeable. "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory." Here the body is a degraded thing, and the grand business of the Christian is to "crucify the flesh with its affections and its lusts." The great endeavour of St. Paul was to "keep under the body and bring it into subjection;" thus treating the earthly tabernacle as a polluted vessel, and reckoning his members as so depraved and defiled, that he must make them his slaves to prevent their becoming his tyrants. But "it is raised in glory." No longer the seat of unholy propensities, no longer furnishing inlets by its senses and appetites for manifold temptations, the body, as well as the soul, shall be rich in purity, and the dishonoured limbs, which had here borne the impress of concupiscence, form a temple which shall sparkle with the lustre of righteousness. "It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." "In weakness." Who knows not, who feels not, how the body is now a clog upon the soul, impeding it in its stretchings after knowledge, as well as in its strivings after holiness? If I would labour to be wise, if I crave acquaintance with the mysteries of science, it is but an inconsiderable part of my time that I can give to inquiry and study. The body is continually demanding to be recruited by food, and refreshed by sleep and invigorated by exercise, even when not harassed by sickness; so that the mind can snatch only a few hours for its favourite pursuits, and must suspend them at the bidding of the wearied and overtasked flesh. But it shall be "raised in power." No longer needing rest, no longer subject to waste, and therefore no longer requiring to be nourished, the body shall be an auxiliary to the soul in all her searchings after truth, and endowed, it may be, with amazing capacities of motion and activity, shall pass rapidly across those spreadings of creation which can now be traversed only by thought, and dive into depths, and ascend to heights which fancy cannot explore, and imagination cannot reach. The apostle adds yet another particular. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." This, it may be, is the grand distinction between the buried and the risen, comprehending every other, though itself scarce comprehensible. We are sure that the body will remain a material thing; and, whatever the refining processes through which it may pass, matter must always differ from spirit, so that each will retain its own peculiar properties. We cannot, therefore, form an idea which shall at all approach the correct one of a spiritual body. Matter and spirit are so distinguished and opposed, that we hardly know what can be meant by spiritual matter, and yet it is unquestionable, that the body of our Redeemer, though certainly material—for he bade his disciples handle him and see, and ascertain by the touch that he had flesh and bones—had yet, in a high degree, the attributes of spirit; for it came out of the sepulchre before the stone was rolled away, and it could be made invisible to the eyes of sense, and it could enter a chamber with closed doors, thus proving itself no longer subject to the laws which matter now obeys. And, at least, if there be a mystery in the nature of a spiritual body, which is at present unfathomable, we may gather from what is thus told us of the Saviour after his resurrection, that matter shall be so etherealized as to partake much of the independence of spirit, and the body be fitted for accompanying the soul in all her marchings over the area of the universe, and in all her divings into its most secret recesses. Now, if the spirit would strive to travel to far-off worlds, it must go alone on the feeble and failing wings of thought, without any equipment for gathering notices of the unexplored territory. It tenants a natural body, and the natural body cannot spring from the earth out of which it is made. But though "sown a natural body," it is "raised a spiritual body;" and the soul, animating and actuating the spiritual body, may carry with it, in all its delighted journeyings, the organs by which it may take the survey, and scan the wonders, and drink in the beauties of the varied and mighty creation, the rock being pervious, and the waters a pavement, and the clouds a chariot, to matter when refined for immortality. And whatever the powers of a spiritual body such as this, of a spiritual body as compared with a natural, we may be confident that the alleged change in matter marks a wondrous adaptation of the whole man to the business of serving the Creator. The natural body is a structure which belongs strictly to the natural man, of whom it is emphatically said by St. Paul, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." When the soul is renewed by grace, the body remains unchanged; and then comes that harassing conflict between the body and soul which forced the apostle to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But if the body become spiritual, there must be thorough harmony between body and soul; and to say, that the body is no longer the natural, is to say, that it is the auxiliary, in place of the adversary of the soul, in the high employ of obeying the will and celebrating the praises of God.

This, then, is the mighty transformation—"sown a natural body," "raised a spiritual body!" Whilst yet a wrestler with principalities and powers, the believer in Christ is opposed by his own flesh, and all his corporeal senses take part with the foes who would withstand him as he presses on to immortality. His body is "of the earth earthy," and the motions of sin work in his members, to the bringing forth, if not repressed, fruit unto death. But "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption," and "when this mortal shall have assumed immortality," the body will be spiritual, not natural; regenerated flesh, sanctified matter; its every organ a minister of righteousness, its every sense an inlet for the majesty of God. Mysterious change! Matter shall rival spirit in consecration to the Lord, and the very walls of the temple be instinct with holiness, and breathe of Deity. And if such be the representations which an apostle gives of the body in which the just shall rise,—representations in regard to which it is impossible to prove any absurdity, though it may be also impossible to unfold all their meaning,—representations on which you can fasten no charge of wildness and exaggeration, but which, notwithstanding the obscurity which their very sublimity occasions, have a soberness and a majesty which you would never find in the writings of a mystic or a visionary; why, we think that, in regard to all the details of the resurrection, as well as in regard to the possibility of the fact, and the credibility of the testimony on which it rests, we may fairly urge again, that there is nothing to warrant what followed amongst the Athenians, on the mention of the doctrine. "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, we will hear thee again of this matter."

Now, it remains that we remind you of the manner in which St. Paul had made mention to the Athenians of the resurrection of the dead. It was in connection with the last judgment. The verse which precedes our text runs thus: "Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The resurrection, then, of the Redeemer is an evidence or witness of his being appointed to judge the world in righteousness; and this was what excited the scorn of one part of the Athenians, and could barely gain audience from the other. And yet it is quite certain, that the resurrection of Christ proves his appointment to the being our Judge; for the resurrection proved the completeness of redemption. The completeness of redemption ensured the bestowment of that recompense which God had promised to the Redeemer, and this recompense included the office of Judge of human kind; for the Father was to commit "all judgment to the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honoured the Father." Remember, then, that the great event which at this season we commemorate is the pledge of the coming of that awful day, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend in power and great majesty, gathering all nations before him, and dividing them as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. As St. Paul, standing on Mars' hill, said to the men of Athens, "He shall judge the world in righteousness." There shall be no escape for those who by the terms of the Gospel deserved to die, and no condemnation for such as have closed with the offer of forgiveness. The effrontery of wickedness shall not disguise it from the Judge, nor the timidity of the lowly cause them to be overlooked. "In righteousness." The kings of the earth, and the noble, and the mean, and the learned, and the ignorant, all shall appear on the same level, and human distinctions be no further recognized, as the business of trial goes forward, than as furnishing items in the great sum of human accountableness. "In righteousness." Every man shall be dealt with in conformity with that rule, that "where much has been given, much will be required; where little has been given, little will be required;" the heathen shall have his standard of trial, and the Christian shall have his; while amongst all those who have been privileged with the gospel, exact reckoning shall be made of the talents of each, and the opportunities and privileges of each. "In righteousness." Actions shall be estimated by their motives, by their intrinsic worth, and not by their pomp and their showiness; and the cup of cold water, given in the name of a disciple, shall gain the reward of a disciple, denied to the profuse benevolence which ostentation may have prompted. Such is the character of the trial, to which Easter gives the pledge—a trial of which every one of us must necessarily be the subject. "Righteousness:" so that nothing shall escape the Judge, and nothing impose on the Judge, and nothing bribe the Judge. If found in Christ, there is no adversary to condemn; if not members of the Mediator, there is no power that can absolve. "Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men:" would that we could persuade you! Is there no voice from the "great white throne"—nothing startling in the opened books, no eloquence in the trumpet of the archangel—nothing terrible in the doom, "Depart, ye cursed"—nothing beautiful in the words, "Come ye blessed?" I cannot deal with you, if you are insensible to the sublime and thrilling oratory of the judgment-seat. If you can go away from Christ's deserted grave, from Christ's awful tribunal, and be as worldly, as indifferent as ever, what can I say to you? I feel that I have no more formidable weapons with which to assail you, and I can but pray that God would put sensibility into the stone, and give you all feeling enough to feel for yourselves.

THE RESURRECTION PRINCIPLE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, APRIL 1, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die."—1 Corinthians xv. 36.

TAKING these words in connection with other parts of the chapter, we may consider St. Paul as intimating, that the resurrection of the body ought not to pass as incredible, just as though it were altogether without parallel. You will remember that our subject on last Tuesday* was the showing you, that the resurrection of the body ought not to be considered incredible. In the operations of nature we may find something strictly analogous to the dissolution and subsequent re-appearance of the body. It would not indeed be fair to argue, that the doctrine of the resurrection is thus either established or explained; but at least there may be found so apt and striking an illustration, that we should act most unwarrantably in rejecting the doctrine as incredible, and against possibility. The resurrection is daily imaged in the processes of vegetation. The husbandman casts the seed into the ground; this seed, after corrupting for a while and dying, in the sense of ceasing to be what it was, springs up under a renewed form, and yields increase to the sower. So that the objections against the resurrection of the body, derived from the dissolution and corruption of that body, would lie with just as much force against the shooting afresh of the corn-blade, after the change which passes on the grain. And though, as we have already intimated, there would be no correctness in inferring the resurrection of the dead from the processes of vegetation, yet we certainly have no right to question the possibility of a resurrection, with those processes continually before our eyes.

Such would seem the general drift of the apostle's argument, as introduced by the words of our text. We do not, however, purpose on the present occasion to confine your thoughts to the single matter of the body's resurrection: the passage is the announcement of a great and general principle, which pervades the whole of God's dealings with men. The principle is that of a resurrection; and it runs, as we shall see, through God's natural dealings, and his spiritual dealings. If we throw aside for an instant all reference to the metaphor, we may affirm, that it is God's ordinary course of proceeding to allow apparent destruction, as preparatory or introductory to the working of this principle. It is not his course to permit the springing up, until there has been, on all human calculation, a thorough withering away. And this it is which we call the principle of a resurrection, pervading leaving them to all the follies of an egregious superstition; and when the Almighty in his mercy interposed, and acted on this ruined creation by the awful instrumentality of his Son's death and passion, it might, we think naturally have been looked for, that the tidings would have passed rapidly into every province, and been eagerly received, and that scarcely any interval would have elapsed, between the two events of Christ's dying for the world, and the world falling prostrate and hailing him as their Deliverer. And yet the fact is, that there has never been more than a partial and scanty diffusion of Christianity. The melancholy truth is, that at no time could a Christian take into his hand the map of the nations, without being compelled to mark as idolatrous more territory than he could claim as evangelized. What can be affirmed now—now that we perhaps touch the very boundary of the dispensation? What can be affirmed, than that, after a series of vigorous and well-directed efforts to plant the cross on every section of the globe, after sending out our missionaries to carry on a war of faith, and of prayer, and of teaching in behalf of Christianity,—what can be affirmed, than that there has been made but inconsiderable progress towards the overthrow of falsehood? Why, very often the increase, amongst the nations of Christendom, of infidelity and scepticism would almost warrant the theory, that were the balance struck between the advancement of Christianity through the conversion of idolators, and the decline of Christianity through the backsliding of its disciples, it would appear as if in place of making progress its empire had been going back. But every student of Scripture will find, that prophecy prepares men to expect such a catastrophe. The picture of a gradually disseminated gospel, of a world evangelized bit by bit, till through the workings of an existing mechanism every tribe, and tongue, and people be brought under the banner of Christ—such a picture can never fairly be drawn from the statements of the Bible. The scriptural representation is rather that of Christianity just keeping, if we may so speak, the head above water, until Jesus shall come in his majesty, and set up that kingdom which is to rise from the wreck of the colossal image that in a vision of the night was seen by the prophet. In place of true religion advancing, as the time of the end draws nigh, it is clear from Scripture, that upon the very threshold of the millennium atheism and infidelity will stand proud and dominant; that the herald of the Saviour's approach will be the bolder scoffing of the impious, and a more determined endeavour to sweep all knowledge of Christ from the earth—a fiercer struggling of the Man of Sin, and withal such a cooling of the love of disciples, and such a shrinking from the torrent of assault, that Jesus seemed almost to question whether his religion would not have wholly disappeared, for he asked, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?" But if the triumphal state of Christianity is thus to be preceded by so depressed a state, which as the end draws nigh is assuredly to grow worse, then we hold that the history of our faith is a most accurate exhibition of God's adherence to the principle of a resurrection. It is indeed appointed that Christianity should be the religion of the whole world. A noble period is marked out by prophecy, when "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea;" but this appointment does not take place, this period does not arrive, until Christianity shall have passed through centuries of adversity, and its opponents have almost seemed to gain the upper hand. Then I ask you, under what imagery can we describe the long depression, and then the sudden and unlimited sovereignty of the religion of Christ, if not by speaking of that religion as of a seed sown in the earth, apparently dying, ere it yield a due return to the husbandman? The tree shall yet arise, mighty in its trunk, and glorious in the spreading of its foliage; and there shall not be a lonely spot on the surface of the globe, which is not overshadowed by the branches of the produce of the mighty grain of mustard seed. And forasmuch as until the dawning of the millennium there shall be but inconsiderable shoots, and those too, oftentimes stripped of their leaves, and bent and broken, we do justly in describing the present time as a season during which, by processes of decomposition, the seed is made ready to germinate, and pointing onwards to a day, when by a wondrous uprising there shall proceed from one stem a firmament, as it were, of boughs, overshadowing the nations. We appeal to God's appointment in respect to the progress of Christianity, as shaped most accurately in accordance with the principle laid down in our text: "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it first die."

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* See No. 2,553 of the Penny Pulpit.

Now, it is further deserving of remark, though we have only space for a passing hint, that God adheres to the resurrection principle in the mechanism, so to speak, by which this final establishment of Christianity shall be effected. We know from abundant Scriptural testimony, that the Jew will be the great missionary to the Gentile, the evangelizing of the world following as a consequence on the restoration to Judea of its long exiled tribes. Thus the Jews are to be regarded as the true missionary-seed, from which indirectly as well as directly shall spring the amazing harvest which shall cover the earth's fields under a new dispensation; yet has this seed been rotting for ages and corrupting in the ground; the Jews for successive centuries have been an injured and trampled down people; who that should gaze on the seed would not pronounce of it, that the germ was destroyed, and it were hopeless to look for future vegetation? But taking Scripture for our guide, we know that the case of the Jew is just a fresh proof that God is only working on that principle which we designate the resurrection principle. The seed is sown, but the seed is not quickened, except it first die. The Jews are now in a state of death: but this is only preliminary to a state of life; and with so much fidelity does the imagery of the Bible keep in view the resurrection principle, that when St. Paul describes the effects of the restoration of the Jews, he goes straightway to this principle, for he says, "What shall the raising of them be but life from the dead?"

And we yet further observe, that in all likelihood, if we could systematically examine those plans and undertakings which God ultimately crowns with his blessing, we should find that they are ordinarily subjected to the very law which we are now occupied in tracing. They do not succeed at first; but after being apparently frustrated, they rise into prosperous working. We cannot, indeed, from the nature of the case, prove to you that such is invariably God's course of proceeding; but we may give you a pertinent instance, and leave you to find out its parallels. The glorious work of the Reformation—a work for which we can never be sufficiently thankful unto Almighty God—was commenced in this country in the reigns of Henry VIII. and his son. Vigorous advances were made towards shaking off the trammels which the Papal despotism had fastened on the nation; but so illustrious a deliverance could not be perfected without an interruption; the work must be completed by resurrection, and therefore it must die before it could be matured. Queen Mary arose, and the fires of persecution blazed high through the land; during her reign the Reformation was not only at a stand still, but progress was made towards enchaining more firmly than ever the almost emancipated country. But a better time was at hand; the sceptre passed from Mary to Elizabeth, and Protestantism in its strength and in its glory was finally established as the religion of the land. And thus the seed which had been sown, as it were, in the days of Henry, and which died under the tyranny of Mary, sent up a full harvest when Elizabeth ascended the throne. Have we not right, therefore, to affirm, that the work of the Reformation exemplified God's adherence to this principle of a resurrection? That which was sown could not have been quickened except it died. We should not perhaps be warranted in saying, that it invariably holds good that success is not allowed until disasters have been experienced; but the more widely you observe, and the more attentively you examine, the more disposed you will be to conclude, that those enterprises on which ultimately God specially smiles seem ordinarily the first to languish under his frown. And this is exactly what we should expect, if the resurrection principle is maintained—discomfiture, according to that principle, being the high road to mastery.

We would only further remark, in reference to this portion of our subject, that the redemption of the world was a signal instance of apparent defeat issuing in unlimited triumph. Christ was victorious through being vanquished; he had won the battle by falling, and he had sown himself as a seed in the earth, in order that its valleys might stand thick with corn. We cannot hesitate to say, that the crucifixion and burial of the Saviour becomes a most striking exemplification of the truth, that what is sown must die before it can be quickened. Christ could not have redeemed us without livingfor us; but there was no redemption work until he died for us. And if there seem anything far-fetched in this application of the text, we need only remind you, that in speaking of his own death Christ used word for word the same language, saying unto Andrew and Philip, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

II. Let us turn now, however, to God's dealings with individuals, and see whether we cannot trace in them, as well as in those which refer to the whole race or to nations, the resurrection principle which is contained in our text. We confine our attention to spiritual dealings, though we by no means consider, as we have already intimated, that temporal are not referable to just the same laws. Let us look, for example, at baptism. The language of our church, as it seems to me, is very explicit in identifying baptism with regeneration, and the language of Scripture seems to bear out the identity, for St. Paul speaks to Titus of baptism as "the washing" or bath "of regeneration;" he speaks to the Ephesians of the church as "sanctified by the washing of water;" and St. Peter declares of baptism, that it saves us,—adding indeed a caution, that we suppose not baptism to be nothing more than "the putting away of the filth of the flesh." But then persons object to the notion of a man's being regenerated in baptism, when perhaps he goes on for twenty or forty years of his life the slave of corruption or the enemy of God. But here comes in the principle of our text. The seed is sown in baptism, but a long season may elapse, before that seed germinate and shoot. In baptism are imparted the elements of regeneration, though the man may continue to all appearance unrenewed through youth, up to manhood, and perhaps even on to the day of life's decline. But should we marvel at this, when it is only a fresh instance, that what is sown is not quickened except it first die? The seed is received in baptism; but for a while this seed must, or may, lie to all appearance lost, and sending forth no token of vegetating power. Then comes a day, when the soil is suddenly broken up, and the sun beams forth in his strength, and the showers come down in their freshness, and lo, the long buried seed throws out the shoots of repentance and conversion, and thus furnishes a demonstration scarcely to be resisted, that God's dealings are ordered according to the principle of a resurrection, and that before there can be quickening there must apparently be dying.

And we may further show you what a close correspondence there is between the method through which ordinarily this shooting up of religion in the heart is effected, and that in which, as we have already seen, God will bring round the final triumph of Christianity. We proved to you that in this latter case the resurrection principle entered into the very mechanism, inasmuch as the Jew, himself now a dead seed, will be instrumental in spreading far and wide that religion which has never yet obtained a quickened state; and now we will prove that there is something very analogous to this resurrection, in the case of a man who has received in baptism the elements of regeneration. The means which God commonly uses to the effecting conversion, or causing the long deposited seed to germinate, is the preaching of the word; but then perhaps it is only seldom that preaching produces an instantaneous effect. The grain is cast on the waters, and many days commonly pass before it is found; and in this fact lies the main of a minister's comfort. He does not conclude his sermon lost, because none of his audience are awakened by it at the moment of delivery; he rather concludes that his word, which seems powerless when uttered, may have entered into the minds of some in the assembly, and shall be remembered hereafter, and prove as a two-edged sword, cutting its way to the conscience and the heart. It were a melancholy and dispiriting thing, if we knew that unless there were an instant effect there cannot be any; but let appearances be ever so much against him, and the minister is far from concluding that he has laboured in vain. He knows from the records of biography, that sermons which have produced no effect at the time have produced a vast effect afterwards; he knows that sinners have departed, to all appearance untouched, but they have taken the word along with them, and when there have elapsed days, or weeks, or months, or years, this word has proved like a fire in their bones, allowing no rest till there was a flying to Christ. Forgotten, or we should rather say, neglected sermons—forgotten, or we should rather say, neglected truths—these have been instrumental to the conversion of thousands, and of tens of thousands. The seemingly dead seed of regeneration has been brought into contact with the seemingly dead seed of the word, and a new man has arisen, fashioned after the lost image of our Maker; and when we thus observe, that God so employs the preached word as to allow it to appear powerless before he makes it powerful, wasted and lost ere it is useful and energetic, why, we seem to have carried to the highest point our demonstration, that his workings are shaped according to the principle of a resurrection, and we may leave as put beyond doubt the truth, that it is a settled rule in his dealings with individuals, as well as with the race collectively, or with nations: "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it first die."

Now, we have thus carried you through a series of illustrations, each bearing on the fact, that whether we take men collectively or individually, God's dealings with them are ordered according to the principle laid down in our text; and I do not know whether I might not say, that this principle is at this very moment to be traced in God's dealings with our country. We have passed through a season of disaster. The national prosperity was vehemently threatened; we were not only plunged into war, but war brought with it, in more than ordinary measure, distressing anxiety. There could but be too much cause for fear, that grievous and enduring ills would be fastened on our country. But what a change has come over us! The stillness of a Sabbath evening has been suddenly broken by the booming of cannon, and peace, God be praised! is restored to the nations. I, for my part, am not one of those who will wait till every article of peace has been published, and criticised, and scanned, before they will exult or give thanks. I have confidence enough in those to whom has been entrusted on our part the arduous task of conducting the recent negociations, to have any fears of this peace being in any sense dishonourable to England or treacherous to the interests of our land; and therefore, with heart and voice I can already say, "God be praised! Praised be thy name, O Lord, for giving us peace." God is he who "maketh wars to cease, he breaketh the bow, and knappeth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire;" but that which we sow is not quickened, except it die; and now, I think, and trust, we shall speedily see, in the fuller development of all plans for internal improvement, for Christian education, for heightening the condition and augmenting the happiness of the great mass of the people, plans which the war seemed to threaten with extinction—speedily I trust to see a glowing proof that what is buried is not lost; that burial is followed by resurrection, and that resurrection is introductory to greater beauty and to nobler grandeur. We may not enlarge further than this; and we attempt nothing, in conclusion, but the simply reminding you, that in proving that the same principle runs through natural things and spiritual, through the book of nature and the Bible, we vindicate the same authorship of both, and prove with the greatest precision that the God of creation is the God also of Christianity. I may declare that all nature wears the appearance of having been designed for the illustration of Christianity. I believe that he who with a devout mind searches diligently into the wonders of the natural universe will find, that he is constantly met by exhibitions which seem to him like pages of Scripture, written on the stars, and the forests, and the waters of this creation. There is such a sameness of dealing characteristic of the natural and the spiritual, that the Bible may be read in the outspreading of the landscape, and in the operations of agriculture, whilst conversely the laws which are obeyed by this earth and her productions may be traced as pervading the appointments of revelation. I look on the natural firmament, with its glorious inlay of stars, and it is unto me as the breastplate of the great high priest, radiant with gems oracular, from which as from Urim and Thummim in Aaron's ephod come messages full of divinity; and when I thus turn to the pages of Scripture, and perceive the perfect sameness between the characters in which this page is written and those which glitter before him in the crowded conclave, I feel that, in trusting myself to the declarations of the Bible, I adhere to him who speaks to me from every point, and by every splendour of the visible universe; and it is a noble and a consolatory truth, that creation and Christianity, having both the same author, follow both the same laws. The universe is my Bible, as well as that precious book wherein God hath revealed his loftier mysteries. In the sowing of every seed I behold myself sepulchred; in the springing up of every harvest I behold myself raised. Nature and Scripture tell me the same; and when out of the grave of the old shall be seen gorgeously rising the new heavens and the new earth, whilst the saints throwing off corruption are putting on incorruption, then shall every rank of intelligence perceive, that one grand law has been dominant alike over creation and redemption; and no fact shall more commend itself to their thoughts, as characteristic equally of God's dealings with this earth and its final population, than that of our text—"That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it first die."

THE RANSOM FOR THE LIFE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, APRIL 8, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them."—Exodus xxx. 12.

THE word which is here rendered "ransom" is afterwards rendered "atonement;" and it is important that we settle the right meaning of the word, or the precise sense in which it is here used. We are so accustomed to understand by "atonement" the propitiatory work of Christ, that whenever the word occurs the idea of that work presents itself to our minds. Not exactly that in reading of atonement we consider ourselves as always reading of the sacrifice of Christ; but atonement is so associated in our minds with this sacrifice, that we cannot hear of the one without thinking of the other. Thus also, when you read our text, where the word is ransom—"they shall give every man a ransom for his soul"—you naturally think of Christ, who, as the apostle saith, "gave himself a ransom for all." 'What ransom,' you ask, 'can there be for the soul, except that which Christ Jesus paid with his own precious blood?' But in the Old Testament the word atonement is employed on many and different occasions, although something of uniformity of sense is always to be traced. The word has originally the signification of that which covers or hides, and the transition is very natural from this to that which propitiates or reconciles; for that which conceals or hides from view whatever is displeasing and offensive to a person, may justly be said to reconcile that person, or to render him propitious; and whatever reconciles parties makes those parties at-one, and is, therefore, fitly designated at-one-ment, or atonement, as we commonly pronounce it.

The notion thus conveyed of atonement, as the word is used in the Levitical writings, may be justified, we believe, in each separate instance. The atonement covered or removed what displeased God, and thus sanctified for his service. For instance, atonement is said to be made for the altar, and for persons labouring under defilement, whether ceremonial or moral. As to atonement for the altar, and for the instruments designed for the offices of worship, we may justly say that everthing in a sinful creation is in itself unworthy to be employed in the service of God. Hence rites were instituted by God, the due performance of which should be considered as hiding this natural unfitness, and thus adapting the altar and its instruments to their holy destination; the performing these rites was therefore called, the making an atonement. Thus, also, in the case of ceremonial uncleanness. This uncleanness disqualified a person for the privileges of public worship; offerings were prescribed, on the presentation of which the uncleanness was to be reckoned removed, and the person was restored to all the privileges of an Israelite. Here again was the making atonement. The ceremonial defilement separated from God, and that which was appointed to conceal or remove the defilement reconciled to God, and therefore atoned. In like manner, when the defilement was moral, when some transgression of law had produced alienation between God and man, God was pleased to direct that certain sacrifices should be offered, and to appoint that on the offering these sacrifices the offender should be restored to the congregation. This again was atonement, in the sense which has been defined. That which had been offensive to God was so far concealed as to allow of the individual re-engaging in the services of the sanctuary. We do not indeed doubt, that in this case the offered sacrifice possessed strictly a propitiatory virtue, and that it possessed this because typical of the sacrifice of Christ; and whenever the offender brought his offering in faith and repentance, looking onward from the shadow to the substance, we may be sure that atonement was made in the full evangelical sense, and that sin was remitted in its eternal as well as its temporal penalties. But since the atonement took place in all cases indiscriminately in which the ritual was observed, it seems evident that our notion of atonement under the law should ordinary be limited to the removal of temporal consequences. Every transgressor for whom atonement was made, regained thereby his outward privileges as an Israelite, whether or not he became a penitent at heart; but we cannot doubt, that he did not also obtain the pardon of sin in the evangelical sense, unless the evangelical as well as the legal conditions were fulfilled, so that he presented his sacrifice in faith, and with contrition. And these remarks may help you in settling the meaning of the words of our text. Bear in mind, that under the law that was said to be a ransom or atonement, which hid or removed something displeasing to God, and thus restored a person or a thing to some forfeited privilege. Remembering this, we may with the aid of the Holy Spirit be enabled to understand and draw important inferences from the somewhat remarkable appointment—"They shall give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord."

Now, if you refer to the verses which immediately follow our text, you will find that a half-shekel was the tax which every man was to pay, and that the sum thus raised was to be devoted to the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Although, as you learn from the text, the assessment was first made on occasion of numbering the people, it probably was repeated as often as it was necessary, so that it became a standing impost. And there is a very remarkable declaration, on which we may take occasion to comment, in regard of this half-shekel tax. "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls." It was this half-shekel tax, which the collectors sought to obtain from our Lord, when they came to Peter at Capernaum, inquiring, "Doth not your Master pay tribute?" You may remember, that we once addressed you on this incident in Christ's life,* showing you that the reasons on which our Lord claimed exemption, "Then are the children free," could only be understood on the supposition of his being the Son of God, in that high sense which made him every way equal with God. There is another passage in the life of our Saviour, which has reference to the tribute-money; and on this also we formerly addressed you.† Many who came to the temple to pay in the half-shekel had nothing with them but the whole shekel; the collectors of the tax were ready to change the whole shekel into halves, but demanded an allowance for themselves; and it was to mark his sense of the unlawfulness of this traffic that Christ overthrew the tables of the receivers, though the tax itself was strictly of divine institution. These are the only occasions on which the half-shekel is referred to in the gospel; but these serve so to associate it with the temple, as to show that its original design was always preserved. The institution, then, as described in our text, was simply this:—every Israelite who had attained to manhood was to pay a specified but small sum of money towards the expenses of the temple. In paying this money, he is expressly said to give a ransom for his soul, or, for both expressions are used, to make an atonement for his soul. The richest man was not allowed to give more than the half-shekel, the poorest man was not to give less than the half-shekel; an ordinance apparently unjust, if the design of the tax had been simply to provide funds for the temple. It is true that the funds thus raised were set apart for the service of the sanctuary, but if nothing had been contemplated beyond the support of public worship, we can hardly doubt that the rich and the poor would have been taxed in proportion to their means. Indeed, the expressions—"a ransom, an atonement for the soul," clearly show that the main design of the impost was a moral design, one therefore with which rich and poor have equal concern, so that we might naturally expect them to be equally taxed.

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* See Penny Pulpit, No. 1,780.

† Ibid. No. 1,589.

What meaning, then,--you must attend closely to this,—what meaning can be attached to that giving a ransom or making an atonement for the soul, which is assigned as the object or result of the half-shekel payment? You cannot for a moment think, that we can here preserve the gospel notion of a ransom or an atonement; there was nothing of sacrifice, and, therefore, upon every reckoning, there could have been nothing of what we count propitiation. Indeed, this is the single instance, amid all the variety of legal institutions, in which an offering of money is commanded; therefore it seems highly probable that it was not a ransom for the soul, so much as a ransom for the life, which the Israelite made when he paid the half-shekel. There is great uncertainty about the word rendered soul; it as often denotes the vital principle as the immortal; nay, even in our own language we make just as much confusion between soul and body. If a ship goes down at sea, we talk of every soul on board perishing. So that you might as accurately translate our text—"They shall give every man a ransom for his life unto the Lord." And since on all occasions in which the soul, the immortal principle, is undeniably concerned, the appointed offerings are strictly sacrificial, we may fairly conclude, that in the solitary instance in which money is substituted for sacrifice, the life or vital principle is intended. This, then, is the first great truth which we have to work out. We shall not, indeed, confine our remarks to the atonement for the life, but introduce likewise the atonement for the soul. But at present it is of the natural life that we have to speak; and we proceed to endeavour to explain to you what is to be understood by the commandment—"When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord."*

Now, the atonement, as already described by its legal definition, is that which so covers or conceals what displeases, as to qualify a person or a thing for the service of God. If, then, a thing be forfeited to Divine justice, whatever prevents the seizure, and obtains for this thing the being yet employed for God, is rightly said to make atonement for that thing. Just thus it is with human life, or rather with the human person, including, as it does, both body and soul. Our persons are forfeited, we have not accomplished the great end of our being, and therefore we deserve every moment to die; and, of course, from the very nature of the case, it is wholly out of our power to offer reparation, or to ransom the persons thus forfeited. God is, however, pleased in his exuberant compassion to continue us in being, and so to prolong our opportunities of acting as his servants; and if, yet further, he were pleased to appoint that this continuance in life should be connected with the payment of a tribute, then, though this tribute in itself could have no life-giving efficacy, and would be only an acknowledgment of dependence upon God, still, as being an instituted mode for the redemption of what was forfeited, it may justly be said to make atonement or to be a ransom for our lives. This seems most accurately to describe the case of the Israelites. You learn from our text, that the neglecting or refusing to pay the half-shekel was to be followed by the death of the party: "that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them." The tax was to be paid as a confession that life had been forfeited, and as an acknowledgment that its continuance depended wholly upon God. God was graciously pleased to ordain, that the payment of this tribute should prevent the entrance of the plague, and thus effect what it was especially the province of an atonement to effect—the ransom of the forfeited, and the prolongation of the season in which it might be used in God's service. And if this be the design and import of the tax—the tax, as we have told you, being the same in amount, whether levied from the rich or the poor, there are great truths, my brethren, which its institution represents. In the first place, you are taught your entire dependence upon God. The Israelites were to pay the half-shekel, in confession that, body and soul, they were dependent upon God. It was a ransom for their lives, that there might be no plague amongst them. Let us look for a while at this great fact.

There are few men bold enough to question or to deny, that God possesses over them so absolute a sovereignty that they cannot draw a single breath, except by his allowance. In the dissipations of a worldly career the fact is, for the most part, overlooked; yet you will scarcely find the instance in which, if pressed to a confession, men will controvert the fact: but there was something eminently beautiful in an institution which brought a nation year by year to the acknowledgment that in God they lived, and moved, and had their being. It is a fine pause which every Israelite was compelled, as it were, to make, even though his course was one of thorough forgetfulness of his Maker, when tribute was demanded of him, in confession that he was a creature subsisting only at the pleasure of the Creator; and there would be a vast probability that many of you would be arrested in your indifference to religion, and prevailed on to consider your ways, if you were brought to such a pause as thus occurred at stated intervals to the Jews. If we could only bring home to you the truth, of all truths perhaps the simplest and least disputed, that God is unreservedly the Lord of life and of death, so that at any instant, if he issue the command, or suspend his providential supplies, you are withdrawn from this world, with all its business, and all its pleasures, we believe that we should find in you eager and interested listeners, as we went on to discourse on the need and the mode of preparing for eternity. It is just a forgetfulness of your dependence upon God, and a consequent taking, so to speak, your lives into your own keeping, from which flow the inattention and the procrastination which threaten you with everlasting ruin. That possibly I have but a moment to live! Could it ever be gathered from the deportment of the vast human throng, that there is not an individual in the busy assembly, but what is bound to address these words to himself? There is not perhaps one of us who lives in that habitual readiness for death, which ought to result from the uncertainty of life; but it may be too true of the majority, that they live as though assured of the long continuance of life. Oh! that we could induce you, according to the language of our text, to give a ransom for your lives! We only want you, the men of business more especially, whose days must be given to engrossing occupation, we only want you to fasten on the fact, that you depend for every breath on the invisible Creator, and to draw from the fact those inferences which naturally suggest themselves to rational beings. We have no language by which to describe to you your hardihood, if with this fact presented to you in its awfulness you can put away the pressing interests of another world, and go forward with your purposes and your plans as though you had the promise of many years upon earth. We can only account for so surprising and destructive an infatuation on the principle, that, after all, you never give yourselves in good earnest to the belief of the fact, but suffer yourselves, however unconsciously, to be deluded by the lie with which the tempter plied our first parents in Paradise, "Ye shall not surely die!" Ye do not bring the half-shekel as an atonement for your lives; in other words, ye have no practical remembrance that in God's hand is the soul of every living thing. Hence it comes to pass, that ye can go on, year after year, apparently indifferent to the fact, that you are approaching nearer and nearer to another state of being, as much engrossed with the world, as little in earnest with religion; and the fearful likelihood is, that in spite of every warning and every entreaty, numbers will at last be found to have incurred the second death, and all because resolved to live as though secured against the first.

And whilst urging upon you, that the half-shekel payment was to keep alive the sense of dependence upon God, to serve as the memorial of his being the well-spring of all life, we would have you earnestly observe, that the rich and the poor were to pay just the same sum. I do not know that in the whole range of Scripture there is a more touching delineation of a truth which we are too apt to overlook, when observing the differences in human condition. We cannot imagine a finer exhibition of the fact, that there is no respect of persons with God, than was given when the Israelites, the rich man in his pomp, and the poor man in his penury, approached with the same atonement, and each offered the half-shekel as a ransom for his life. It was of all declarations the clearest and most unqualified, that in the sight of the Almighty the distinctions of rank and of estate are altogether as nothing; and that whilst he gathers the whole human race under his guardianship, there is no difference in the watchfulness which extends itself to the several individuals. And never do we view God under a more wonderful aspect, and never do riches and honours appear less worth our solicitude, than when all the members of the family of man are thus brought to the same level, and that providence which has to threw its carefulness to the farthest outskirts of creation is represented as circulating amongst them with a most thorough impartiality. It is common enough to speak of the life of this or that individual, as of more than ordinary value. The chieftain at the head of an army, the statesman on whom the welfare of a country seems to hang, the father on whose exertions a numerous family depend for subsistence; in these and the like cases we account life especially precious, and we give our deepest lamentation if death make an inroad. Let it be left to ourselves to impose a ransom, and we shall proportion it with reference to the interests which seem to us consulted by the life, and injured by the death of different individuals. I do not believe that any human legislation would have ordained a tribute, attaching the same worth to the life of a solitary beggar, pining away in his wretchedness, and the monarch whose death will be as an earthquake to an empire. The one will pass from life altogether unnoticed, and leaving no blank behind; whilst the other must depart amid the regret of thousands, bequeathing perhaps distraction to far-spreading provinces. And must both give equally the half-shekel tax—the rich no more, the poor no less? Is the life of the one of actually the same worth as the life of the other? Beyond all question. The beggar has been summoned into being, that he may strive for immortality; the monarch has been summoned into being, that he may strive for immortality. There is a difference in the stage on which they have to wrestle; there is no difference in the object of their creation. The life of the one may on every human calculation be vastly more important to his fellow-men than the life of another; but this is nothing; the ransom is for life, as of value to himself; and when God looks down from his throne, and takes the survey of the human population, oh! the separating circumstances of station and of wealth must altogether vanish. The palace is but the residence of a probationer for eternity; and the hovel is but the residence of a probationer for eternity: life, then, must be regarded in no other light than that of the preparation time for an unbounded duration; and in place, therefore, of a tribute graduated according to position in society, we can expect that nothing will be demanded but a uniform acknowledgment. There is, therefore, additional proof, if proof could be wanting, that the point of view in which men are regarded by their Maker is simply that of creatures passing through a state of probation. He has breathed into all the breath of life, in order that all may have opportunity of winning immortality. All, therefore, appear to him in the same light, and life, as being granted to each, that each may struggle for the same prize, is of the same worth to each, and shall be ransomed at the same cost to each. It cannot be important that this man should live, because others depend upon him; it cannot be comparatively unimportant that this man should die, because this man stands alone in the world. God, who is the Father of the fatherless, can uphold a family as well without as with an earthly parent; and he who seems to us of least worth to others, may, for aught we can tell, prove the instrument in God's hand by which the suffering may be succoured. So that the value of life is only to be rightly estimated by considering it the seed-time for eternity; and when thus considered all differences disappear, and the every moment of each individual seems infinitely and unspeakably precious. If I rank amongst the destitute, sorrow and privation making up my earthly portion, I am still a living thing; and in having life, I have, if I will, immortality. I may be classed with the great ones of the world, all that is attractive being woven for my heritage; but it were better for me had I never been born, if I simply live to any other end but that of securing admission into heaven. In both cases, then, ought I not to render the same tribute for my life? In the one case shall I give less than a half-shekel, because I am struggling with afflictions not worthy to be compared with the glory for which I strive? In the other, shall I give more than a half-shekel, because exposed to greater danger of losing that for which alone I was created? Shall I not rather, whatever mine earthly state, encourage myself in the persuasion, that all men are regarded by God as equally his children; that he has placed them all with distinct reference to the grand object for which they were called into being; that his providence encircles them all with the same carefulness, because all are permitted and all appointed to seek the same happiness? Ah! then, the lowly cottage, whose inmates are grappling with actual destitution, encloses beings as precious in the sight of the Omnipotent as those upon whom he has showered the rank and the riches of the earth. And if at any time I feel shaken in the persuasion, and the life of one insignificant as myself appear of too little worth to be cared for by God, why, it should scatter every suspicion, and it should restore all my confidence, to know it enacted, that the rich should not give more, and the poor should not give less than half a shekel, when the Israelites had to set themselves to obey the injunction of our text—"They shall give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord."

Now, we have been proceeding on the supposition, that the ransom enjoined in our text was a ransom for the life; understanding by the word "soul" not so much the immortal as the vital principle in man. On this supposition we have connected the text with other passages, having reference to the tax, and have shown you from the professed object of the tax, and from its having been levied on all classes alike, that we are simply and entirely dependent upon God, and that there is no respect of persons in his sight. But if we take the word "soul" in its ordinary sense—if we suppose our text to appoint a ranson for the soul—there will be no need that we alter or restrict our observations. We may regard the prescribed equality of payment by the rich and by the poor as a clear indication that the thing ransomed, whether the life or the soul, was of equal worth in God's sight, whatever the condition of those who brought the half-shekel. If, then, the ransom be a ransom for the soul, and rich and poor were to pay the same tribute, the conclusion is irresistible, that God values at the same rate the souls of all human beings. He demands of us an atonement for the soul, as well as for the life; he would have us feel and confess that we are as dependent upon him for the continued existence of the immortal principle as for the prolongation of animal life. Is it fitting that I reverently declare my consciousness that I cannot draw another breath but by the Almighty's permission? Then it is also fitting that I own, that unless God please to communicate afresh from his fulness, the soul, unquenchable as I call it, would be suddenly extinguished. Of all beings throughout the universe, God alone is essentially and inherently immortal. It is not because I am material that I make an atonement or ransom for my life; if I were purely spiritual, if I were all soul, I should still be bound to make atonement for my life. But who knows not that the whole creation, from the loftiest archangel down to the most insignificant tenant of a leaf or a bubble, hangs on the Creator, so that if he who first summoned him into being were for a lonely instant to cease to sustain, there would be suspension of animation throughout all orders of existence, and the pulse of life beat only in the Godhead. I would offer, then, a ransom for the soul; I would present my acknowledgments of momentary dependence on God for the life of that mysterious principle which fits me for communing with himself. I count myself indestructible; I feel that I have that within me which can never die; but let me not forget that spirit as well as flesh subsists only at the pleasure of the self-existent Jehovah, and if I confess it of his mercy that I am still reckoned with the living, let me recognize that mercy in being yet classed with the immortal. And there is much, moreover, to be said, when the enjoined ransom is thus taken as a ransom for the soul, on the rich not being required to give more, and on the poor being forbidden to give less. If God demand the same ransom for the soul of every human being, we recur to our proposition, that the souls of all are alike precious in his sight. We have nothing to do, whilst we maintain such a proposition, with objections that may be brought from difficult doctrines or conflicting appearances. The rich and the poor were to ransom the soul at the same price; and therefore whatever may seem done more for one soul than another—more favour shown, more assistance extended—we are bound to conclude that in all cases God attaches the same worth to the soul, and regards it with the same desire for its happiness. We have no right to suppose differences in the natural constitution of the soul. There are, indeed, vast appearances of difference; you can hardly suppose the soul of the idiot the same in its capacities as the soul of a man pre-eminent in intelligence; but the present is not the season for the full development of the soul. This is, after all, but the time of its imprisonment; and though on some occasions this principle may wondrously stretch forth, and amaze a world by its magnificent actings, still it is to the future that we look for the soul's perfect freedom; and necessarily ignorant what causes may on earth have repressed in one case and encouraged in another the partial exhibition of power, we are also ignorant whether, amid the scenery of the unmeasured hereafter, all souls may not spring to the same greatness, and all souls prove the possession of the same endowment. So that souls may be strictly of the same worth, equipped with the same energies, capable of the same dignities, and therefore to be ransomed by the same tribute. And if we were void of other reasons for counting all souls of the same worth, should we not find abundance in the fact, that the souls of all have been actually redeemed at the same price? For the soul of each one amongst us the Lord Jesus Christ paid down the same price; it did not cost more to purchase one soul than it it did to purchase another; all were equally bought, and all and each bought at the wondrous cost of the untold anguish of the Mediator's death. Where is the soul not redeemed by Christ's blood? Where is the soul which less could have redeemed? Oh! we feel no marvel that the rich must not give more, and the poor not less than half a shekel, in atonement for the soul. Let rich and poor appear before God, to confess it of his grace that the soul, which long ago deserved death for its iniquities, still lives, still expects immortality; let them come to confess, that they might all have long ago been cut down as cumberers of the ground; and therefore it is only of the Divine unmerited goodness that the soul has still hope of pardon and acceptance. Shall there be any difference in the offering which conveys the confession? The soul of the rich man, God redeemed it by the blood of his Son; the soul of the poor man, God redeemed it by the blood of his Son. It was not because there were myriads upon myriads to be ransomed, that so unmeasured a price was paid to Divine justice; what sufficed for unnumbered generations was not too much for a solitary individual; and we have every warrant from Scripture for believing, that if there had been literally but one man to redeem, Christ must have died for that man, otherwise the lonely thing had everlastingly perished.

It is not, then, an overcharged statement, that every soul has been redeemed at the inestimable price of the blood of God's Son—that the Mediator died that this soul might live; and if, then, rich and poor acknowledge by a tribute, that from God is the life of the soul, shall they not acknowledge it by the same tribute? Yea—for it may be that gospel truths are shadowed by this legal institution; it may be that when at the numbering of the people the same offering was exacted from all, in order that the plague might be stayed, there was typically shadowed forth the great doctrine of propitiation for sin—yea, they must, both rich and poor, bring identically the same ransom, the same atonement for the soul. Is more required for the rich? Will less suffice for the poor? And is it not true of every child of Adam that there is a ransom, that there is an atonement for the soul, with which he may appear before God? But if he either add to it, or diminish from it—if he would increase its worth by anything of his own, or detract one iota from either its necessity or its efficacy, he just does what the Israelite would have done, had he brought more or less than the appointed half-shekel, and he can only expect as the recompense of his disobedience to be cut off in wrath from the congregation of the faithful. It may be thus that in demanding the same atonement from all—in not merely enjoining, as our text has it, that every man should bring a ransom for his soul, but in adding, as you have it afterwards, that rich and poor should pay alike, God taught the Israelites that all would need the same, and God promised the Israelites that the same should be provided for all. The good Samaritan, who is so exquisite a figure of our blessed Redeemer, who in his bending over the wounded traveller whom the priest and the Levite had passed carelessly and contemptuously by, represents with so much of beautiful fidelity the Saviour compassionating and succouring by the provisions of his gospel the wretched outcast who could never have been justified by the deeds of the law,—the good Samaritan, we say, gave two-pence for the sustenance of the traveller whom he rescued from death. It may be wrong to lay stress on all the minute parts of a parable; such portions of Scripture should be interpreted by their general import and scope, and we are more likely to be indulging in imagination than investigating truth, when we search for a meaning in every detail; yet it may be worth observing, that two-pence is the same sum, though differently expressed, as the half-shekel which the Israelites were bidden to bring as a ransom for their souls. We will not, we say, build anything upon this; but we have pleasure in finding, that in a parable delineating human redemption the sum given for the support of the rescued is that exacted under the law as a ransom for the soul. Our text, then, you see, may be taken both ways—a ransom for the life, or a ransom for the soul. For the life. Oh! act not as though indebted to any but God for the boon of existence! When Jerusalem fell, the Roman Emperor ordered that the half-shekel, which the Jews had been used to pay to God, should in future be paid to his idol at Rome. Be ye watchful, lest your employment of life mark forgetfulness that ye owe it to the Almighty. If ye devote it to the service of sin, this is rendering unto Satan the half shekel which ye are bound to offer unto God. Then it is also a ransom for the soul. Seek it only in the finished work of Christ. We are instructed to offer it equally to you all. We are instructed to declare, that God loves you all; that he willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that all may repent, and turn unto him and live. Approach, then, your heavenly Father with this ransom in your hands; make it your only plea of acceptance, and you will find it sufficient. Yes, sufficient; for whilst the institution remains, that "the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less," the appointment stands sure, that "God hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Yes; take Christ's merits with you, as the ransom of the soul; and when God numbers his people at the great day of account, there shall be no plague amongst you; nothing shall separate you from his love in Christ Jesus.

THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY TO IMPROVE THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, APRIL 15, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."—Proverbs xxviii. 6.

WE ordinarily attach great importance to rank, and there is not perhaps one amongst us who does not feel in a certain degree awed when addressing an individual far superior in station to himself; and this deference for rank does not mark anything of a servile disposition, but results from the workings of a well regulated mind, and is so natural to us that we have scarcely an option whether or not it should be felt. The season of childhood and the contracted stage of a household are preparatory to mature life and the businesses and intercourses of society. We have learned, or we should have learned, in the family circle to submit ourselves to elders; to give honour, and yield obedience to those who are above us; and when we take our place in an enlarged community we carry with us the sentiments which have been centred in the domestic scene; so that quite as a matter of course, and without any schooling of the mind to the performance of the duty, we are conscious of emotions of respect towards those who move in higher walks than ourselves; and we believe it a sound position that there is no greater evidence of moral derangement, for there is nothing which more shows that the discipline of childhood has been neglected or forgotten than that disposition to speak evil of dignities, and to put a slight on the distinctions of society, which prevail in days of democratic ascendancy. We believe that the precepts—"fear God," "honour the king," as they stand associated in the statute book, so are they in practice indissolubly connected. We do not pretend to say that a man's religion is to be inferred from his politics; but where a man is wanting in loyalty to his earthly sovereign, it will perhaps generally be found that he is deficient in his allegiance to his heavenly. We admit, indeed, that cases will occur in which the worthlessness of the individual may be set against the dignity of his station, and the result will be that respect for rank will be fairly lost sight of in contempt of character. It is a fine vantage ground on which birth has placed the nobles of a land, and they have much to answer for if they fail to attract and preserve the good will of their inferiors. That inherent respect for rank of which we have spoken, and which cannot without sensible violence be expelled from the mind gives them at the outset a surprising advantage which they must almost, as it were, take pains before they can lose; and we believe there never arises that state of things in a land which may be described as a tottering of the social pyramid through the restlessness of the lower orders at the exaltation of the upper, unless those who possess the advantages of station have failed in adding to them the advantages of character. We have so much confidence in what we term the inherent respect for dignity, that we doubt whether history will ever furnish an example of a virtuous nobility despised and overborn by the inferior population. But whatever the advantages which rank communicates, he who possesses them may through his worthlessness draw upon himself universal contempt, and thus not only forfeit the respect which would be readily awarded to him on account of his station, but become scorned and despised by the lowest and meanest of the land. Those who would presume on their rank, as though it gave them a kind of privilege to be voluptuous and dissolute, or furnish an apology for listlessness and incapacity, are just endeavouring to exalt nobility of place at the expence of nobility of character—an endeavour which, being opposed to immutable laws stamped with the impress of Divine legislation, can issue in nothing but their own degradation. For the prime nobility, after all, is the nobility of virtue, and no greatness is so transcendent as moral. When the two meet, when the exalted in station are also exalted in character, the combination is splendid, and sheds its lustre over an age or a country; but when the two are separated, when the exalted character is of the lower orders, and only the exalted station of the upper, we may not hesitate to assert that these orders have virtually changed places, the real elevation being that of the inferior classes, and only the apparent, that of the superior. We must bring into reckoning both states of man's existence, and regard him as a being whose life-time is immortality. When we calculate for the whole duration, and not an inconsiderable fraction, God forbid that we should ever compare that nobleness that terminates with death with that whose subsistence we know to be for eternity. Thus the peasant may be even more dignified than the prince, the one being heir to a heavenly, and the other only to an earthly throne. Or if both be walking in the ways of righteousness, the mean man may far outstrip the great in the attainments of religion, and thus win to himself the loftier allotments when both stand together to receive their everlasting portions. So that in various ways, in various scenes, at various times, you may perceive how our text is made good —how true is the assertion which the wise man lays down. "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."

Now, there are many trains of thought which might naturally be evolved from this passage, the following out of which might both interest and instruct you; but we have to bring before you the subject of the Education of the Poor, inasmuch as we are to make our annual appeal on behalf of the Schools of this Ward. We shall therefore confine ourselves to such views and illustrations of the text as have a bearing on this subject, and may suggest at the same time important and general lessons. You will observe at once that if the poor man walk in his integrity, he must be supposed to possess that practical wisdom which is so much spoken of in the book of Proverbs, that wisdom of which the beginning is "the fear of the Lord," and of which it is declared, that its "merchandize is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold;" and the rich man who is perverse in his ways is destitute of this wisdom; so that the presumed difference between the poor man and the rich is in the possession of true religious principle: the one is a God-fearing man and the other is not. And certainly, it is a blessed thing to know, that in having Christianity in our hands, we have an instrument for grappling with that wretchedness which results from inequalities in human condition, and for bringing about such a revolution in society as would satisfy the desires of the most ardent philanthropist. If, as Solomon has elsewhere declared, the poorest child, when made wise unto salvation, becomes better than the king who may have half the world at his disposal, but who will not be admonished to prepare for futurity, what a noble change would be wrought in the circumstances of our lowest population by the general and hearty reception of the gospel of Christ! It follows that thoroughly to Christianize the lower orders would be to cover the land with contented, ay, in a moral sense, with dignified families. If it be true, that by imparting wisdom to the youth of a country, we should, in some sense, raise even the most destitute amongst them to superiority over the proudest of its nobles, unless they have added this wisdom to their nobility; can it be denied that we have in Christianity such an engine for improving the human condition as is just fitted to realize those sanguine dreams of political economists which would change the present mass of degradation and wretchedness for the beauteous spectacle of a community of virtuous and well-ordered households? We do not say that such an exchange is altogether visionary, but are we sure that it will never be brought round—nay, we shall make none but inconsiderable advances towards it, so long as we try any method but that of impregnating our people with the religion of the gospel. Woe unto those who would separate religion from legislation, as though it were beneath statesmen to take lessons from the Bible! Never would a country be so near to the summit of greatness, never would its families be approaching so high a standard of respectability and sufficiency, as when ruled in the fear of God, and on the simple practice that the efficient way of making men sober, and honest, and industrious, is the making them solicitous for the salvation of their souls. The true worth of the connection between Church and State lies in this —the State feeling it as much its interest as its duty to uphold religion amongst its subjects establishes and employs the Church in order that Christianity may be disseminated, and its truths perpetually enforced on the population. So that the connection between Church and State is the standing witness to a principle which otherwise would seem quite out of date; the principle, that to promote the piety, is to promote the good order and happiness of a people; and that moral greatness is both the foundation and the safeguard of the civil.

But we wish to show you with somewhat more precision—the worth of Christianity as an engine for improving the condition of the poor. With this object, we will endeavour to point out to you, in the first place, the influence which true religion exerts in reference to the duties of life; and in the second place, that which it exerts in reference to the trials of life; and forasmuch as it is the possession or non-possession of true religion which is indicated by the walking in integrity, or the being perverse in one's ways, we think on both accounts to show you how accurately it follows, that "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."

I. Now, there has been too much tendency in recent days to the speaking of useful knowledge, as though it did not include religious knowledge. We have heard much of a diffusion of useful knowledge within the reach of every class in the community; but when you come to examine the knowledge which has usurped the definition of useful, you too commonly find it limited to sciences and histories, and embracing little or nothing which has relation to the soul and eternity. At least, the definition is somewhat misplaced. The really useful knowledge must be that which equips man for immortality, which informs him how he may secure himself happiness through the immensity of his being. No doubt, there is much that is useful in the knowledge which is confined to the circumstances of our present existence; we confess this, and we rejoice as much as any man in the fact that such knowledge is fast making its way into all the recesses, into all the cottages of the land; but when we compare this knowledge with the knowledge of God and of salvation through Christ, how can we doubt its relative worthlessness? Though knowing how prone men are to keep the future out of sight, and to live as though persuaded that the present contracted stage is the only one on which they are to move, we might the less wonder at their attaching little worth to the diffusion of Christianity, if it were not easily demonstrable that Christianity is as effective in fitting men for the duties of life as it is in preparing them for the solemnities of judgment. If the precepts of the Bible were acted out by any community, there would be banished from its circles whatever tends to produce discord and insecurity, and nothing would be more observable than a universal endeavour to uphold order and to promote the general happiness. If a man be imbued with the fear of God, he has a principle which must accompany him, into all the intercourses of life and exert an influence over each portion of his conduct; teaching us that we live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world; that we obey magistrates, that we "render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." And is it not evident that the gospel, if cordially received, would turn the refractory into the orderly, the dissolute into the virtuous, and that just as it made way into a nation, the interests of that nation would be consolidated, it strength increased, its prosperity augmented? There is no truer saying than this: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people!" And if this saying be true, it follows that you heighten the condition of a people by heightening the tone of religion, and that so long as no attack is made upon its sinfulness you leave them under a reproach which is not to be hidden by the lustre of warlike achievements, nor silenced by the fame of scientific discovery. And if you argue that the morality and virtue of a nation may be cherished and increased by other engines than the simple gospel of Christ, we contend that unless you bring to bear upon men the sanction of future punishment and reward, you will make no way in prevailing with the many to abandon courses which depraved nature loves. If it were even possible that we might frame for ourselves a code of morals, as simple and sublime as is furnished by Scripture, it would be idle to send this code through the land just as though men would love virtue for itself, and to make it merely an article of what is called useful knowledge. The grand desideratum is, that men should be roused to a sense of the necessity of reformation of life, of imminent peril if they neglect this reformation; and that they should be shown that, however high and difficult the task, it may be performed inasmuch as sufficiency of assistance is within the reach of all. And whilst all this is furnished by the gospel, it is furnished by nothing else but the gospel. Let the gospel find its way into a cottage where there is a drunkard or a thief, and it presently plies this unhappy man with engines peculiarly its own. It does not enlarge, as might a philosophical treatise on morality—it does not enlarge on the comfort and decency of sobriety, or the advantages which result to society from holding sacred the rights of property; it assumes at once higher ground; it tells the man of his deathlessness; it pours out against him the denunciations of his Maker; it declares that the practices of his life are ensuring an eternity of torment; and when the man stands aghast at the spectacle of his condition, filled with dread at the consequences of his actions, and yet feeling himself so hampered by evil habits that he can scarcely form a resolution to amend, then the gospel comes in with its encouragements. It speaks to him of a Surety who died in his stead; it tells him of a sanctifying agency which is ready to make his own breast the scene of its operations; and thus, assuring him at one and the same time that he has not offended beyond the reach of mercy, and that he may obtain superhuman help in wrestling with the corruptions of his nature, animates him to the work of reformation, and moulds him into the obedient subject and the trustworthy neighbour. But there is no other known instrumentality in the world through which we can hope to effect the transformation. There could be no probability whatsoever of this moral revolution, if you attacked the man with essays on drunkenness and theft as offences injurious to society, and therefore requiring to be put down by public opinion and public justice. You must bring the man to feel his own interest at stake ere you can make him mindful of the interests of society; and if he be deriving his pleasure or profit from the courses which you wish to correct, you will not make him feel his own interest at stake unless you gather the future under his contemplation, and prove to him that he shall be dealt with hereafter by the strict law of a retributive economy. Yea, and when this is done, if you cannot further acquaint him with the possibility of pardon, if you cannot show him that his case is not desperate, you will have driven him to recklessnes rather than to amendment—to a determination to continue in sin rather than an endeavour to overcome evil. And if there must be this combination of truths in the announcements which are fitted to produce the moral revolution, we again say that these announcements can be none other than the announcements of the gospel. Christianity is a system which presents terrors which alone would drive men to despair, but which presents also offers which encourage the unworthiest to put from them the evil of their ways. Christianity, then, is the engine by which alone we can hope to effect a radical improvement in an overgrown and degraded population. Christianity is emphatically useful knowledge, containing lessons for every station in life, motives to every duty, directions in every difficulty. Oh! we cannot tell you what a cheering thing it is to the Christian philanthropist, after looking with weariness on the well-meant, but inadequate schemes which politicians propose for improving the condition of the people, to turn to the religion of Jesus, to observe how the introducing it into every household would be to scatter the worst causes of national trouble and unhappiness. It is a truth susceptible of the clearest demonstration that such is the power which the wisdom from above directs towards the discharge of all the duties of life, that, in prevailing on a man to seek the salvation of his soul, we bind him to all those virtues with the diffusion of which the well being of a state is indissolubly associated. A parish of true Christians would be a parish of loyal subjects, united families, and industrious labourers. Cover a country with such parishes in its length and in its breadth, and it would present nothing but order, contentment, and activity, the grand elements of national independence and national growth, so that when we would strive to improve the physical estate of a people by methods which have no direct bearing on its spiritual, we put from us the sovereign specific which God has revealed, and can expect nothing but disappointment from remedies invented by ourselves. We begin at the wrong end when we direct ourselves first to temporal interests; and give not the prime concern to eternal, for in proportion as you awaken attention to these you will find improvement overspread the temporal. And when once we have certified ourselves of the truth, that thoroughly to Christianize would be thoroughly to regenerate the land, we cannot look on a poor man, or on a poor child, without feeling that his insignificance tells nothing against his possible capacity as an instrument of good to his country. If he be made wise, if he walk in his integrity, an onward step is taken in the great work of improvement; and forasmuch as this work, in place of being advanced, is manifestly retarded by the noblest in rank, if wanting in wisdom, and going on perversely, tell me what proposition can be truer than that laid down by Solomon in our text: "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich?"

II. But we shall understand more accurately the worth of Christianity for improving the condition of the poor, if we consider briefly, in the second place, the influence of this religion upon the trials of life. Hitherto we have only spoken of the duties. Now, there is nothing more admirable in the Bible than the exactness with which its various parts adapt themselves to men's various circumstances. We have often told you, and we find every day increasing reasons for asserting that there is a standing witness to the Divine origin of Scripture in the correspondence between the Word of God, and the wants and the consciences of the hearers. It matters not what may be my condition, or of what sudden and unlooked for revolutions I may find myself the subject; let me be only in the habit of applying to the Bible for counsel and encouragement, and I shall always find a word in season; some text which has all the appearance of having been written on purpose for myself, the thought of one who knew all about me, and who foresaw exactly the message I should need. And certainly that book must commend itself to me as the work of the Omniscient, which thus meets my own case just as though constructed with distinct reference to every care, and difficulty, and exigence in a long and varied career; and I gather from the nicety with which Scripture fits into conscience, and from that intimate converse which it holds with all the emotions of the heart, that he who made conscience his vicegerent, and gave the heart its thousand strings, must be the very Being who spake to the world through prophets and apostles. But if the Bible thus prove its divinity by its adaptation to all the circumstances of human condition, you will at once admit that the religious man has a vast advantage over the irreligious, however in temporal respects the superiority may be wholly with the latter. The poor cottager finds in the promises and announcements of Scripture a mighty counterpoise to all the troubles by which he is oppressed. The instant that he recognizes the appointment of a heavenly Father in the penury with which he has to wrestle, there is given, as it were, a dignity to want which causes it to appear even preferable to abundance. Taught to walk by faith, and not by sight, he can maintain his serenity amid the gatherings of all that seems adverse, so that if sickness be added to poverty, and there come that accumulation of trials which one often sees in the hovels of our labourers, when the wife and children, pining away under some lingering disease exhaust the always scanty resources, and have not what they need, even then he holds fast his assurance, that all things are "working together for good," and is more than a match for the calamity which seems taking his household by storm. We are sure, if you made it your business to search into the experience of the poorest Christians, you would find the lessons and promises of the Bible thus serving as a balance to the toils and trials of life. The hopes of another world wear a special brightness to the poor from contrast with the gloomy realities which here too often make up their portion. The history of Jesus and his apostles—of that Redeemer who had not where to lay his head, and of those champions of truth who were made as the offscouring of all things—this comes home to the destitute with a force derived from their destitution, so that they can feel a peculiar companionship with the Founder and first teachers of the faith. And then, again, as they have fewer earthly comforts, they are less tied down to a scene which we are all too apt to regard as our home, and, having little to leave, hold themselves in greater readiness to depart. Thus in an extraordinary manner Christianity adapts itself to the circumstances of the poor; and we shall not hesitate to say that the amount of temporal happiness introduced into the lowest family by making it religious, far exceeds that which would follow on the making it rich. It is not that religion will exclude want and remove trouble, though it must not be overlooked that you will generally find the religious family more thriving, just because those vices will be unknown, and those virtues cultivated, which respectively obstruct and promote the prosperity of a household; but if religion augment not the substance, it communicates contentment, and the poor man contented with his poverty is a far happier and more dignified being than the rich man restless and dissatisfied with his abundance. This it is which Christianity does for a family: it does not substitute the luxurious banquet for the bread and the water, but it makes the family feel that the bread and the water are more than they deserve, and as much as is for their good, and thus gives a relish to the scanty fare which would make the lordly feast a poor exchange. Christianity does not diminish the labour which is required to the obtaining a livelihood, but it sends man to his work in the strength of his God, and thus so braces him for the effort that the demand on his energies seems lessened. Christianity does not prevent the entrance of sorrow, but it produces such submission to the will of a wise and compassionate Father as lightens the burden and causes it to be felt as intended for good. Christianity does not shield from death, nor secure its recipients against long and painful disease, but, showing death spoiled of its sting and the grave of its victory, it so nerves for the last conflict as to take away its terrors. And if Christianity effect all this for a household, where will you find us the engine by which so much may be done towards the improvement of human condition? What will induce so general a contentment? What will so augment the sum total of happiness? What will ease so many hearts, dry so many tears, scatter so many anxieties, excite so many hopes? What will apply an equal power to the meanest and the most suffering, as with wearied spirits and over-tasked strength, they grapple with hardship, animating them with patience, and even inspiring them with thankfulness? Oh! if it be to improve the condition of the peasantry, to banish murmurs and discontent, to exchange uneasiness and solicitude for quietness and confidence, to provide an antidote for evil in its worst shapes, to possess a never-failing soother of care, an inexhaustible source of consolation, a guide that will never deceive, a hope that will never make ashamed, then the improvement is effected in the exact degree that Christianity is diffused. We would not compare, even in respect of present happiness, the man at whose disposal is every luxury of the earth, but whose heart has not received the truths of the gospel, with another, who can scarce procure daily bread, but whose affections have been given to God and the Redeemer. Religion has such a power of softening what is rugged, enlightening what is dark, sustaining under the heaviest pressure, and encouraging in the most perplexed circumstances, that as nothing can supply its place, so its possession more than compensates every other want. He who has it may be said to be wealthy in his poverty, and he who is without it to be a beggar in his abundance. Where there are riches it will sanctify them, teaching the owner to consecrate them to God; where there is bare sufficiency it gives contentment which gold cannot purchase, and the earnest of a portion not to be bartered for all the wealth of this creation. This it is which Christianity, operating wondrously on all the trials, as well as all the duties of life, is both designed and adapted to effect. Let, therefore, Christianity gain entrance into the hamlets and hovels of our country, and there will presently break upon the lower orders that golden age which has yet glowed only in the dreams of poets; the poorest feeling themselves "heirs of God, yea, joint-heirs with Christ," will bear cheerfully the affliction, "which is but for a moment;" and those who have to struggle with trouble in its most appalling shapes, knowing that "tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope," will present the aspect of undismayed and even rejoicing men, not to be overborne because sustained from on high, not to be disheartened because secure of immortality.

And, if Christianity admitted into the homes, and woven into the hearts of a peasantry would thus elevate the poorest families, and ensure them as large a measure of happiness as consists with a state of moral discipline, then the opposite proposition must also be true, namely, that the wealthiest families, void of religion, want the chief element of happiness, and are not to be compared to the mean and the wise. The little child, taught like Samuel, to kneel before his God, and to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" that child has more of real nobility, and is born to better things, than he in whose veins is the blood of monarchs, but in whose heart are no higher principles than those of a corrupt nature. The poor child may be just entering on a life of hardship, with no likelihood of rest till gathered to his fathers; the individual with whom we compare him may be throned in greatness, being used to power, and surrounded with all that can minister to majesty; but we say that the wisdom of the child outweighs all his disadvantages, and that the folly of the king takes the worth from all his magnificence. If he who has a preservative against the evils of life be better than he who lies exposed to its worst shipwrecks—if he whose dignity is celestial and everlasting be better than he whose honours are earthly and evanescent—if he who has learned in whatsoever state he is therewith to be content be better than he who is ever grasping at some imaginary good, because what he has is unsatisfying, why then it is a proposition which the meanest and the youngest amongst you must unhesitatingly admit, that "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."

Now, it has been our object throughout this discourse to impress on you the power of Christianity to improve the condition of the people, and thus to satisfy you as to the importance of a religious education of the poor. We can safely say of the Schools which now make their annual appeal to the frequenters of this Lecture, that they take as their basis, their system of education, the pure Word of God, and that therefore they are exactly calculated to be instrumental in working that great social improvement which we have been endeavouring to trace. It is by starting and multiplying schools such as these that we may hope to make head against the ever-growing mass of ignorance and vice. We have evidence enough from the recent attempts at legislation that, divided as the country is by religious differences, and jealous of all interference with what are thought the rights of individuals, there is no present probability of a government being able to construct and bring to bear any general system of state education. But this is only a reason why the voluntary principle should be more earnestly pressed; and I call upon you to show that, so far as you are concerned, this principle shall not prove deficient. I know that, perhaps, there are but few of you who reside within the Ward for whose poor you are thus asked to contribute, but I have always the same thing to say on these annual occasions, and that is, that in making use of this church you incur a kind of debt to the parish, and that you ought thankfully and liberally to embrace this single opportunity of at one and the same time discharging a duty and doing a good. This, as I have said, has always been the plea on which I have urged your contributions; and though I am loth to introduce anything personal to myself, yet I may perhaps say that as I am never likely to ask your contributions again—as this, in all probability, is the last time I shall preach a charity sermon in this place, I may, I trust, without impropriety, express a hope that the last collection will be among the best. And certainly, if there had been wanting motive to strenuousness in imparting Christian knowledge to the poor, it might be gathered abundantly from the words of our text. If you enter the courts and alleys of a densely peopled district, the condition of the children would excite your sympathies as much, or even more than that of the adult population. You will feel that, however pitiable the spectacle of vice and degradation by which you are too often met, the worst spectacle of all, because that which augurs the continued infliction of wretchedness on a neighbourhood, is just that of a rising generation growing up in ignorance of God, and trained to crime by the dissoluteness of their parents. You will see that little or no approach can be made towards the moral renovation of a country, except by dealing, and that most vigourously, with the infancy and boyhood of that country. Nothing, indeed, is too hard for the Lord; and, therefore, we would ply the manhood and old age of crime with the lessons of the Bible; but the alone hopeful attempt is that of applying Christianity as a preventive for turning away the children from the steps of their fathers; and when you muse on this attempt, and debate whether even thus you may look to make head against moral disorder, then such sayings as that of Solomon in our text come in and bring you most signal encouragement. If there be truth in our text, the poorest person, the poorest child, made wise unto salvation, is better than the noble and rich who know practically nothing of religion. Then the imparting wisdom to this child, training this child to walk in integrity, must be of a worth which is hardly to be calculated. If the single circumstance that the poor child has true religion, whilst the exalted individual has not, outweighs all differences in rank, and causes those advantages to disappear, which the highest station and most ample wealth previously communicated, I can labour at the religious instruction of the child with the confidence of one who is conscious that he is plying the mightiest engine in the most efficient mode. The Parochial School, gathering boys and girls of the lower orders trained in the fear of God, may be a nursery for those who are to be better citizens hereafter: better morally, because admitted into the heavenly Jerusalem; better politically, as doing more towards the strengthening the institutions of the country. May God impress these truths on your minds! May God make you feel what power of doing good you have in being able to assist in disseminating the gospel! Then on this and every like occasion you will display liberality in promoting the education of the poor.

ST. PAUL'S CURSE ON TEACHERS OF FALSE DOCTRINE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, APRIL 22, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."—Galatians i. 8.

AMONGST those many circumstances which prove the thorough suitableness of the gospel scheme, there is none more remarkable than that of the work of its publication being entrusted to men. That the appointed preachers of the gospel are men, and not angels, is an arrangement which marks equally the wisdom and the loving-kindness of God. It is indeed easy to see, that if angels were visibly employed as God's ambassadors, there would be much apparent advantage; and it is equally easy to see, that it would be more than counterbalanced by the actual disadvantage. We may believe that the preaching of an angel would carry with it a weight and a convincingness which can scarcely ever attend the preaching of a man; but then you must remember, that it is not consistent with the design and nature of Christianity, that the evidence of its truth should be in any sense irresistible. There could be nothing like a state of moral discipline, if men had no power, if they chose, to be infidels; and as, if our pulpits were occupied by preachers from the invisible world, the likelihood is, that we would then have no option of believing or disbelieving, it is evident that one great purpose of Christianity would be altogether frustrated—even the purpose of dealing with men as free to choose between evil and good. Besides, even if we waive this consideration, you may easily perceive how injurious it would be to you, that angels and not men should be your teachers. The great beauty now of these public assemblings lies in the fact, that the speaker and the hearer are on just the same level. There is no advantage on the side of the man who brings the message, as compared with the man who receives the message. He who tells you of your sinfulness has the same accusation to bring against himself; and in pointing you to a Saviour he indicates the source of all his own confidence. His trials are yours, and your dangers are his; the same hopes, the same fears, the same prospects. And this, we say, gives a charm to the association between the speaker and the hearer. There is a sympathy, arising from sameness of condition, which could never exist between angels and men, and the removal of which would diffuse a cold suspicion through the listening throngs in our churches. The angel might protest against the indulgence of evil passions; but there would be a feeling in the audience, that he knew nothing of the strength of those passions, and therefore did not make them allowance. He might denounce as utterly vain and contemptible the riches, and the honours, and the pleasures of the world; but there would be a quick retort in the minds of the assembly—that admitted as the preacher was to the enjoyments of a higher state of existence, it was very easy for him to throw scorn upon those of a lower, and that at least the being of one nature could be no fair judge as to what could meet the desires of a being of another nature. He might descant glowingly on the love of a Saviour, and expatiate on the results of Christ's passion and obedience; but the knowledge that he himself could have no interest in the blessings which he laboured to exhibit would give to all his pathos and to all his persuasion the air of speaking for effect. The more high wrought and the more energetic his pleadings, the more would they be met by the feeling, that since they could not be dictated by experience they were only to be regarded as fine strokes of oratory. In short, there could be no speaking of the heart to the heart; and where this is impossible the utmost which eloquence can do is to produce mental excitement, and will make little or no way towards moral improvement. If it be one of the main excellencies of Christianity, that "we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," we must regard it as also another of those excellencies, that we are ministered to by beings of like passions with ourselves, who know our every temptation because exposed to it, and sympathize with our every sorrow, because fellow-heirs with us of trouble. And though, if an angel came down to minister in one of our churches, there would be the gathering of a great crowd, and the listening with a rivetted attention, and the hanging breathlessly on his lips, as with an oratory to which we had been strangers he addressed us as immortal, and summoned us by the joys and terrors of the world whence he came, yet if sin is to be spoken of—the corruption of the heart, the need of an atonement, the sufficiency of Christ, then give us the speaker who can speak experimentally—not the angel, who, compassed with purity, has no battles with evil, but the man who can address us in the language of David—"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul."

Now let us advance a step further. We admit that there would be a weight and authority in the preaching of an angel which cannot in fairness be expected to attend the preaching of a man; but should we be justified in receiving as truth whatever was announced, because announced by an angel? Let it be supposed that in these our own days there appeared upon earth a being who was evidently more than human, so that, whatever the form he assumed, it might be demonstrable that he belonged to another order in creation. He shall display powers and prerogatives, which leave it altogether unquestionable, that whatever the mysteriousness of his being, he is one of those magnificent spirits that stand in God's presence, and hearken to the voice of his word; and the angel shall proceed to deliver messages in the name of the Almighty, sustaining his words by his actions, appealing to the wonders which he works in proof of the truth of what he utters. Now, there is at first sight a strong case made out why we should believe such a preacher, and resign ourselves without reserve to his leadings. We are certified that he is an angel, ay, and an angel from heaven, and it would therefore seem our business to give implicit credit to all which he announced; and the likelihood undoubtedly would be, that the celestial preacher would at once gain the assent of the great majority in the land, and that if a few refused to be carried away by the appearances of a commission from God, and demanded that the doctrine which he published should be tried by some rigid and long known criterion, they would be quite borne down by the voice of the community, and denounced as mystics, who could resist the testimony of their own senses. And yet it is possible that these few might have truth upon their side. At least, they would certainly be right in refusing to believe merely because a preacher was confessedly angelic; for however reviled for their doubts and hesitation, they might manifestly shield themselves under the authority of St. Paul. Does not this apostle in the text suppose as a possible case, that of an angel from heaven preaching a false gospel, and therefore deserving to be accursed? This deserves your closest consideration. If the tenets of the new teacher contradicted those of the gospel which had already been published, then, according to St. Paul, that teacher was to be instantly and indignantly rejected. There might be sign, there might be prodigy; but there was also error, and the falseness of doctrine must point out as accursed the man who could appeal to the majesty of miracle.

And we cannot here avoid observing, before we enter on a minuter inquiry, how weak is that reason which would argue from the holiness of a teacher to the truth of what is taught. We believe, in respect of modern errors and delusions, that many have found it difficult to admit their true character, because perplexed by the known piety of their originators and upholders. The idea has been, that where the cases were manifest of the heart being right, it could not be supposed that men would be allowed to go so far astray from sobriety and truth. We are not concerned at present in inquiring how it may come to pass that practical piety may consist with doctrinal error; but we know that if an angel from heaven were to minister upon earth, one of his most striking characteristics would be holiness. And yet we also know, from the tenor of our text, that we should be bound to sit in judgment on his preaching, and not to take for granted that the doctrine was sound, because the preacher seemed righteous. There are certain standards to which doctrines must be referred, and by their agreement with these, and not by the character of their supporters, are we bound to decide upon their truth or their falseness. A miracle by itself is no proof of truth, and neither is holiness; and whatever the appearance of want of charity, in charging heresy or delusion upon men who walk a course of righteousness and self-denial, we simply ask, when urging personal excellence as a guarantee of doctrinal soundness, whether an angel from heaven could not be exemplary in his life, and whether, nevertheless, if there be force in the text, he might not incur an actual anathema by the errors of his creed. We give personal character its due weight, and its due place; but when God has appointed "the law and the testimony," to which to appeal, we will not substitute for this a holiness which it is at all times difficult to prove, and which is no security against falsehood, even if we prove it angelic.

But we now turn to those more general and important conclusions, which seem necessarily to follow from the words of our text. In the first place, every part of revelation must be consistent with every other; for if any teacher, whether angel or man, is to be accursed, who should teach aught at variance with the gospel of Christ, it is necessarily impossible that one part of a revelation from God should contradict any other part. In the second place, how were the Galatians to know that propounded doctrines disagreed with established doctrines? Evidently by careful comparison of the two. Then it must have been their duty to try what professed to be truth by its consistency with what they knew to be truth. Here, then, are two conclusions, which we will set before you as clearly and as practically as we can. Revelation must in all its parts be consistent with itself; Christians must use known truth as a test by which to try whatever else may be proposed to their belief. These are the conclusions to be examined, and which follow necessarily from the assertion of the apostle—"Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Now, suppose for the sake of illustration, that a proposed gospel sanctioned anything at variance with the moral law. Then since we may affirm of this law, that it is written on the conscience, the two revelations would be contradictory, and we should be bound to decide that one cannot be divine, because opposed to another, of whose divinity we are certain. Thus a man might raise the dead, and hush the tempest; but if he taught the lawfulness of theft, I should be bound to shun him as an impostor. There is an internal and undoubted revelation, which tells me that theft is unlawful; and he, therefore, who would bring me another gospel on this matter, let him be accursed. This, however, is but an illustration. The great rule in question is, that every part of a revelation from God will be consistent with every other part, as indeed it must be; for to affirm this would be no more than to affirm that with God is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." As revelation is multiplied, fresh disclosures will break upon mankind; but forasmuch as from the beginning it is the revelation of a being who is always the same, these disclosures must be always in harmony, so that none of the latter can be contrary to the former. Of course it does not follow that every doctrine of the more recent revelation is to be found in the more ancient; this would go far towards denying any increase in the amount of revelation; but it does follow, that nothing can be advanced in the more recent at variance with truths advanced in the more ancient, whatever the additions to the sum total of truth communicated. We contend for such consistency as this, as the necessary characteristic of a series of revelations, and we maintain it to be found in those successive disclosures which we acknowledge as divine. We take the Bible into our hands, and examine diligently its several parts, delivered in various ages to mankind. There is a mighty growth in the discoveries of God's nature and will, as time rolls on from creation to redemption; but as knowledge is increased, a brighter light is thrown on the divine purposes and dealings. There is never a point at which we are brought to a pause by the manifest contradiction of one part and another. It is the wonderful property of the Bible—a property which it could not have, except as the word of the Omniscient and immutable, and which as His word it cannot be without,—that it never withdraws any truth once advanced, and never adds new without giving fresh force to the old. In reading the Bible we always look, as it were, on the same landscape; the only difference being, as we take in more of its statements, that more and more of the mist is rolled away from the horizon, so that the eye can include a broader sweep of beauty. If we hold converse with patriarchs occupying the earth, whilst yet in its infancy, and then listen to Moses, as he legislates for Israel, and then to prophets, throwing open the future, and then to apostles, as they publish the mysteries of a new dispensation, we find the disclosures always bearing with more or less distinctness on one and the same subject. The later speakers, if we may use such illustration, turn towards us a larger portion than the former of the illuminated hemisphere; but as the mighty globe turns majestically on its axis, we feel that the oceans and lands which come successively into view are but constituent parts of the same glorious world. There is the discovery of new territories, but as fast as discovered the territories combine to make up one planet; there is the announcement of new truths, but as fast as announced they take their place as parts of one immutable system. Yes, there is vast difference between the epistles of St. Paul, and the Psalms of David, or the prophecies of Isaiah; but it is the difference, as we have just said, between the landscape whilst the morning mist yet rests on half its villages and lakes, and the same outspread of scenery, when the noontide sun irradiates every spire and every rivulet. It is the difference between the moon, as she turns towards us only a thin crescent of her illuminated disc, and when in the fulness of her beauty she walks our firmament and scatters our night. It is no new landscape which opens on our gaze, as the town and the forest come out from the shadow, and fill up the blanks in the glorious panorama; it is no new planet which comes travelling in its majesty, as the crescent deepens into the circle, and the line of faint light gives place to the rich globe of silver; and it is no fresh system of religion, which is made known to the dwellers on this creation, as the brief notices given to patriarchs expand in the institutions of the law, under the teachings of prophecy, till at length in the days of Christ and his apostles they burst into magnificence, and fill a world with redemption. It is throughout the same system—a system for the rescue of men through the interference of a Surety; and revelation has been only the gradual development of this system—the drawing up another fold of the veil from the landscape, the adding another stripe of light to the crescent; so that the early fathers of our race, and ourselves, on whom have fallen the ends of the world, look on the same arrangements for human deliverance, though to them there was nothing but a cloudy expanse, with here and there a prominent landmark, whilst to us, though the horizon loses itself in the far-off eternity, every object of personal interest is exhibited in beauty and distinctness. And if the revelation have been thus but the gradual unfolding of a grand and long determined plan—a plan to which no alterations could be introduced, because devised by that Infinite Wisdom who knew from the first every possible contingence, and carried on by a faithfulness as unbounded as His wisdom, why, it necessarily follows, that revelation must throughout have been consistent with itself. Therefore it is not enough that a teacher command wonder-working power; there is no proof from Scripture, but altogether the reverse, that where a miracle is wrought there must be a message from God. You ask me to believe what a man teaches, because he has displayed to all appearance supernatural might; but I require first of all to be informed what it is he teaches. I give no heed to the miracle, till I have rigidly examined the doctrine. You may appeal to the miracle in proof of the doctrine; but I must take just the opposite course, and appeal to the doctrine in confirmation of the miracle. I do not dispute that the miracle has been wrought; but the first thing I have to decide is, whether the doctrine be sound that it professes to sanction. The truth of the miracle is a secondary thing, as compared with the truth of the doctrine. I cannot be certain that God is interposing wherever there is miracle; but I can be certain, that God is not present wherever there is false doctrine. And if you then demand a criterion sufficiently strong for discriminating this, before deciding on the evidence of miracle, we derive it at once from the consistency of revelation. If one gospel be from God, no other gospel can be also from God. Admitting, therefore, that the Bible is Divine, whatever clashes with the least tittle of its statements must be rejected as falsehood, though sign and prodigy be appealed to for its truth. Let an article of faith be repugnant to the Bible, and earth and sea and air may be crowded with portents, at the bidding of the teacher; but we should be bound, if we would not sin against God, to reject the article, and to class the teacher with false prophets. So that, however harsh at first sight may seem the anathema of our text, if you only observe that neither miracle nor holiness can substantiate another gospel, unless revelation may be inconsistent with itself—unless, that is, there may be change and variableness with God, you must admit that the curse cannot fall where it is not deserved—that it cannot fall but on the head of a presumptuous deceiver. Ay, if the preacher were not only armed with preternatural powers, but could be proved to belong to a higher order in the creation—a member of one of those ranks of illustrious beings which stretch upward between man and his Maker! oh! it would not be the nobleness of his origin, nor the loftiness of his endowment, nor the dazzling brightness of his purity, which could be set against the inconsistency of his doctrines with the doctrines of Christ. I might marvel indeed how one who still seemed arrayed with the glory and the beauty of an unfallen nature could be engaged in the business of withdrawing man from truth; I might mourn over perverted power and prostituted greatness, and that darkest of all moral eclipses, when the shadow of apostacy has fallen on a splendid star, and that star has clothed itself with light; but the single fact, that he preached another gospel would compel him to rank with the inveterate enemies of God and of man; and I have no choice, unless prepared to hold that God denies himself—no choice but to assent to the justice of the denunciation of St. Paul—"Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

We go on to our second conclusion from these words of the apostle. I think it must be clear to you, that St. Paul assumed two things, as fairly to be expected from those whom he addressed. They must first satisfy themselves that the gospel he had preached was truly a revelation from God, and they must then rigidly compare with this gospel whatever was pressed upon them as an article of faith. And thus it is with ourselves. Full conviction of the evidences and thorough acquaintance with the doctrines of Christianity are both required of us, if we would not lie exposed to the attacks of false prophets. We must be satisfied that Christianity is divine, otherwise we have no right to exalt it into a standard by which to try professed revelations; and then we must understand what Christianity teaches, otherwise when thus exalted we shall be wholly unable to apply it. And we fear that in both these respects there is lamentable deficiency in the great mass of Christians. If we were to examine you one by one as to your reasons for receiving the Bible as God's Word, should we obtain from many a clear and a satisfactory account? And if then we probed in the same way your knowledge of the contents of the Bible, would it for the most part be more than superficial? Yet unless assured as to the evidences, and acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity, you clearly cannot do what St. Paul expected the Galatians to do, distinguish truth from error. You cannot decide that the angel must be rejected, as preaching another gospel; for, in the first place, you cannot prove that St. Paul's gospel is a revelation, and in the second place you know but imperfectly what that gospel contains. We have, therefore, a twofold duty to press upon you all, as declared followers of Christ: the duty of determining, first of all, why you believe—the duty of determining, next, what you believe. Unless equipped on both points, we know not how you are to resist seducers, with whom, as Scripture tells us, the last days shall abound.

First, then, we press on you the duty of determining *why* you believe. We refer you to the requirement of St. Peter—that Christians should be always ready to give to every man that asketh them a reason for the hope that is in them. We attach the greatest worth to this inspired injunction, as satisfactorily proving, that the hope of believers in Christ is in no sense a baseless or indefinite thing, but rests upon grounds which may be demonstrated to the scoffer. We know indeed that there is a great probability—a probability which perhaps increases with privacy of station, that you may pass through life without much assault upon your faith. You may never be challenged to produce the reasons of your belief, and therefore you may never practically make the alarming discovery, that you believe without a reason. But this is not a matter on which to rest on a probability, in such days as these more especially, when, if not under the garb of an angel from heaven, yet in varied and insidious shapes, infidelity makes its way into the quiet valleys, as well as the stirring cities of our land. No man is secured by privacy of station against attacks upon the faith which he professes; and therefore should none of you be satisfied, unless prepared to give a reason of that hope. Let each of you ask himself whether he would have answers at hand, if plied with such questions as these: "Why do you believe the Bible inspired?" "How do you know that writings which bear the names of Matthew or Paul were actually written by such persons?" "Where is my proof that the histories of the New Testament are authentic histories, relating nothing but what actually occurred?" These are plain questions—questions which, if you ever think on the claims of Christianity, must force themselves on your notice, and which may fairly be proposed to you by persons who wish for information, as well as by others who intend opposition. Can you give a reply to these questions? Have you a reason for believing that the Bible is inspired—that the gospels are genuine and authentic? If not, we advise you that you no longer quite neglect the outworks of Christianity. If God in his mercy have appointed, that the evidences of our religion should continually accumulate, and if he have directed many of his servants to the work of arranging and displaying them, ye can have no right to remain ignorant of what gives stedfastness to faith, and to be content to believe without a reason. I do not forget that he who believes has the witness in himself; but this is altogether personal, and if it do much towards upholding its possessor, can do nothing towards convincing his antagonists. It is not a witness that can be produced against doubt and suspicion, and therefore not one which can fit you to be valiant for the truth—not one which in many instances can keep you from being beaten down by the adversary. I know indeed how easy and how popular it is to urge, that those who have travelled into the citadel need give themselves no concern about the outworks of Christianity; but the truth is, that unless the outworks are defensible, the citadel is a shadow, and though you maintain that the outworks are defensible, though you cannot defend them, rely on it that it is not in human nature to be forced altogether to abandon a fort without constantly suspecting its strength; to say nothing of the consequent triumph afforded to the adversary, and the injury done to the cause of God and of truth. Therefore we unreservedly urge upon you the duty of determining *why* you believe, knowing that if the preaching of even an angel from heaven must be rejected with abhorrence, if it display another gospel, it is of paramount importance that you know thoroughly the claims of that gospel which is to expel every other; knowing also, that if you will not inform yourselves of the grounds on which Christianity demands to be received as divine, it will not be only the superhuman teacher, wielding the machinery of miracle, by whose false doctrine you may look to be staggered, but that your confidence may be shaken, and your comfort marred, by any and every of those disseminators of falsehood, who, as the worst foes of a nation's greatness, because foes to a nation's piety, promoting infidelity as the best means of promoting anarchy, sapping the sources of present happiness, by undermining the hopes of future happiness, who fall justly under the emphatic malediction of St. Paul—'Even though they be angels, let them be accursed.' That, then is what you have to do—to know *why* you believe.

Then, finally, you are to examine and determine *what* you believe, as well as *why* you believe. The passage is most valuable in this respect, as opposing those dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church, which would take away the right of private judgment, allowing men to form no opinion for themselves, but requiring them to receive implicitly whatsoever is laid down by their ecclesiastical guides. It is quite evident that in delivering the decision of our text St. Paul constituted men judges of the gospel—of what was consistent with it, and of what was inconsistent. The inference seems undeniable, that in matters wherein salvation is concerned every man is to judge for himself—God having furnished him with a rule by which to try doctrines, and commanded him to reject, without regard to the authority of the teacher, whatever that rule determines to be error. And then it is further evident, that if men are to judge for themselves, by comparing what they hear with the gospel, what to believe and what to disbelieve, it is incumbent upon them to be thoroughly acquainted with the gospel—with all the doctrines and all the bearings of Christianity. They are indeed to judge for themselves what is right, but they are to judge only by agreement or disagreement with the Bible; and what, I pray you, can be the worth of their decision, if they know but little of the criterion? They are to be judges, and so entirely is it their own fault if they be not competent judges, that to admit error is to ensure condemnation. And yet, alas! if you look into the Christian world, what a readiness is there to assume the office of judge, and what remissness is there in obtaining the qualification! Out of a hundred who pass judgment on a sermon, there are perhaps very few who can justify their sentence from Scripture. They decide on doctrine by its agreement with their own notions, and seldom think of deciding on their own notions, by their agreement with the Bible. Therefore we press it upon you, as the most important of duties: do you determine for yourselves, by prayerful study of the Bible, what the gospel is. I know that if I preach to you another gospel, I fall under the anathema of the text, and can expect nothing at the great day of account but the portion of the unfaithful steward. I know that every minister of our church is bound to apply to himself the words of St. Paul—"Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel;" but then I also know, that with nothing of infallibility claimed for us, or by us, and with the Bible delivered into your keeping, you are not dependent for your creed on your teacher, and may therefore as much look to be condemned if you receive another gospel as I myself if I preach another gospel. I cannot indeed pronounce myself free from the blood of my hearers, unless "I have not shunned to declare unto them *all* the counsel of God," adding nothing and detracting nothing; but if I cannot exonerate myself from all share in their ruin, if they hear error from my lips, I can deprive them of all excuse, if they embrace error and are thereby destroyed. For I do not ask you, and no minister of our church ever asks you, to believe anything on his own authority; I ask you to try everything that you hear by the test of Holy Writ. It may be another gospel which I publish; I may have been seduced from the truth; the love of argument, the desire of pleasing men, the fear of giving offence, the wish to be wise above what is written—all may combine to draw me, all may combine to draw any minister, aside from pure and vital Christianity. But if I thus destroy myself, this will not excuse you. The Protestant receiver of false doctrine must perish with the Protestant teacher of false doctrine; for whatever the teacher taught, he referred his hearers "to the law and to the testimony," urging them to compare what he preached with the Bible. If he taught error, at all events the error was accompanied by the emphatic direction, "Search the Scriptures;" and had the hearer done this, the error would have been detected. *Why* you believe, and *what* you believe—these, then, as we gather from our text, are the points that you should examine and determine. We commend them to your earnest attention, and pray God Almighty to give you a right understanding of the truth.

INTELLECTUAL RELIGION.

A Sermon

Delivered on Tuesday Morning, April 29, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul."—Deut. xi. 18.

INTO the land that had been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses the servant of the Lord was not permitted to enter; he must die on the mount, and not go over the Jordan, and see nothing more of the goodly inheritance than could indistinctly be discerned from the summit of Pisgah. We have no power of ascertaining what, or whether, any degree of acquaintance with the affairs of this earth is possessed by disembodied spirits. We are fond, indeed, of imagining that the souls of departed kinsmen and friends retain something of companionship with ourselves, and that though not allowed to mingle visibly in communion, they are not so detached as to be altogether ignorant of what passes in the scene of their pilgrimage. There can be nothing dangerous, though there may be much that is incorrect in such an opinion as this, so long as it is not allowed to draw off our minds from the Creator, and attach them by fresh and strong links to the creature. The risk is always considerable, that when we people the invisible world with earthly friendships, we may come virtually to lose sight of Christ Jesus, as "all and in all" to his church. But allowing the notion to be harmless, it might be difficult to prove it altogether scriptural; and indeed, when we remember how large an ingredient is sorrow in every man's portion, we may well imagine, that it would not consist with the deep repose and happiness of separate spirits, that they should be spectators of what befals those whom they loved whilst on earth. We know these spirits to be inaccessible to pain; but it far surpasses imagination to conceive how, if they were lookers on, while anguish and toil wore down the beings in whom their sympathies had centered, they could fail to be disturbed, and to be conscious of an interruption to the rich tranquillities of their rest. And it has always seemed to us, that the account of the last days of Moses is against the opinion that the soul whilst in the separate-state has any perception of what passes upon earth. The Law-giver longed to gaze upon the land which should be given as a dwelling place for those whom he had led out of Egypt; he longed to go over the Jordan, and he could have died contented, if he had been permitted to see Israel established in Canaan; and we cannot but believe that there was a persuasion on the part of Moses, that death would altogether detach him from association with tribes in whose welfare he was interested, so that if he saw not the promised land, and Israel settled in its possession, whilst yet in the body, he could not bend down from the world of spirits, and mark the beauties of the country and the march of the conquest. And when God commanded his servant to go from the plains of Moab up to the mountain of Nebo, and pointed out to him its cities and valleys in the wide-spread panorama, and said, "I have caused thee to see the land with thine own eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither," it would certainly seem as though Divine sanction were given to the belief that after death there could be no intermingling with human affairs, and that the spirit disentangled from the flesh would have no liberty to expatiate over the provinces of this lower creation. If the soul in the separate state could throw her gaze upon the earth, and thus still preserve alliance with the land and with the people, it would be hard to explain why, in the last moment of life, and for the purpose of softening disappointment, God conducted Moses to a lofty mount, from which he might behold, though distantly and indistinctly, some glimpse of the beautiful in Palestine. But leaving that about which nothing definite can be ascertained, we observe, that in the Book of Deuteronomy, in his warnings and exhortations, he speaks as one who knew the day of his dissolution to be at hand, and felt himself about to be separated from a nation he loved, in a crisis the most eventful of its history; and there is, consequently, a pathos in various parts of the Book of Deuteronomy that is not to be surpassed in any portion of the sacred writings. You cannot read the book without perceiving, that Moses delivers himself with the energy and affection of one who knew that though his strength was unabated and his eye not dimmed, he had but few days to remain upon earth, and who therefore desired to gather into a parting address whatever was most calculated to arrest the attention and confirm Israel in loyalty to Jehovah: and if we attach a more than ordinary interest to the last words of distinguished individuals, if we think that men eminent for piety, when they stand on the frontier line between time and eternity, may snatch mighty fragments of thought from the glimpses whtch they have of the future, and so tell us glorious secrets with their parting breath, ought we not to listen with a most reverent attention to the Law-giver with whom God had spoken face to face, whilst in the thought of a speedy dissolution he pours forth lessons, and warns, and exhorts? Nay, shall not the character of the speaker and the solemnity of the occasion conspire to making us alive to the danger of such a knowledge of religion as is confined to the head, when it is Moses, and Moses shortly before his death, who delivers the emphatic injunction to the Israelites, "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul?"

Now, we believe that in our own day, perhaps more than in any other, there is a risk of men's being satisfied with a merely intellectual religion. There is no denying that the age is one which, when compared with the past, may be designated intellectual; and undoubtedly the likelihood is great, that the character of the age will tell upon the character of the religion of the age, and that a mere head knowledge of Christianity will satisfy many of the admirers and cultivators of intellect. It is indeed but too possible and common that religion may be overlooked by the worshippers of intellect, as altogether unworthy of their attention; but then it is only utter ignorance which can induce the persuasion, that it is beneath a man who would cultivate intellect, to study the Scriptures; for we are sure, that if we could fasten down to theology, as you may to a mere human science, the attention of a great idolater of intellect, he would feel himself interested and captivated by the study, and push forwards in the investigation of truth with as much ardour and as much gratification as though it were some field of literary inquiry across which he was endeavouring to pass. The prejudices of the natural man against anything connected with godliness will indeed, for the most part, prevent this yielding attention to Christianity; but if, through one cause or another, there be a partial overcoming of these prejudices, and the natural man be brought to undertake what we may call the intellectual pursuit of religion, we are confident that he would find so much in the Bible to employ his reason, exercise his judgment, and fascinate his imagination, that he would not rest till he had made himself a thorough theologian, though all the while there might be as broad a separation as ever between himself and the kingdom of heaven. And besides this possible case of surrendering to religion an intellectual homage, in which, from the beginning to the end, the heart has no share, we believe that with those who are really converted the head very often outruns the heart, and that many truths are acknowledged which are not at all felt. And it is a matter of great moment, that the heart and the head should advance at the same rate; that as fast as truth is admitted into the intellect it should be embraced by the affections. Many Christians suffer grievously in their spiritual condition, through not being upon the watch, that experience may, if possible, keep pace with intelligence. Their critical acquaintance with the truth is greater than their practical acquaintance; and the consequence of this is, that they reduce certain portions of the Bible into a dead letter, not extracting their virtue, though they have possessed themselves of their meaning. Hence opposite classes are alike concerned. In the present subject of address, we want to show you the danger of a merely intellectual religion: and since in one degree or another such a religion may be possessed by men who have nothing else in common, there can be none of you unconcerned in our exposition of this injunction of Moses, "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul."

Now, let it first be distinctly observed, that there is a great province for the understanding as well as for the affections in the matter of true religion. It is the business of reason to search and scrutinize the claims of the Bible to the being received as inspired; and there can be no proper place for the exercise of faith, until there be in some shape these exercises of reason. Every man who receives the Scriptures as God's Word, considers that he has a good reason for giving them this reception; he may, or he may not be able to arrange a convincing demonstration of the inspiration of the Bible, but at all events he supposes that such a demonstration is quite within his reach, and he will therefore assume as a kind of axiom, in all his examination into the contents of the volume, the Divine origin and consequent authority of the Bible. So that reason has a great work to perform, before we enter upon the department of faith. I can never ask a man to believe that the Bible is God's Word, except as the result of a diligent and pains-taking inquiry; but when once this inquiry has been made, when once the conclusion has been arrived at, that the Bible is inspired, then, indeed, we expect of a man that he prostrate his reason before the disclosures of the Book, and that, whenever these disclosures surpass his comprehension, he give them that unhesitating admission which is due to the confessed fact, that they are communications from God. And over and above this employment of the understanding in determining the evidence of the volume, and therefore the veracity of the doctrines, a man is to read Scripture with just the same endeavour to gain a clear and intelligent acquaintance with its statements which he would make in perusing an ordinary book. There is no fault in the effort to comprehend whatever comes within the range of a finite comprehension. The only fault is in the refusing, when a point is reached by which the understanding is baffled, to receive on God's word what we cannot clear up by human reason; and thus the intellect is to be no idle agent in religion; on the contrary, it might rather be asserted that before any doctrine can be embraced by faith, it must be submitted to the intellect; for a man must know what he is to believe before he can believe it; and here comes in the truth which we are most anxious to exhibit, that you may all be put upon your guard. We contend that faith cannot be in advance of the understanding; but we are equally clear that the understanding may often be in advance of faith. We are not speaking of mere historical faith, but of that powerful and working principle which the Scriptures alone recognize as faith; and we say that faith cannot be in advance of the understanding, for, according to the foregoing statements, a man must know the object of faith before he can believe: he must know that there are three persons, and but one God, ere he can believe a Trinity in unity. But then, on the other hand, the understanding may be very far in advance of the faith, for a man may have knowledge of a vast variety of truths, on not one of which is there any influential fastening of his belief. So that whilst there is a kind of necessity that the intellect possess itself of doctrines before they can become objects of faith, it by no means follows that the intellect will send them on to the heart: on the contrary, it is a thing of most common occurrence, that the intellect will retain them as merely speculative truths, and that the historical uninfluential assent is the highest homage which they shall ever obtain. And our business is to endeavour to show you the danger of this laying up of religious truth within the confines of the intellect, and the consequent importance of attempting all obedience to the precept of our text. There is a danger to those who are unconverted; there is a danger also to those who are converted. We begin with the former, and we declare that the parties on whom it seems hardest to make a moral impression are those who are thoroughly well acquainted with the letter of the gospel. If, when sickness and trouble weigh down a man, so that he stands, as it were, open to moral attack, you address him on the evil of sin, on the love of God, and on the work of a Mediator, we shall not hesitate to say, that you plead at a comparative disadvantage, when there is already an abundant head knowledge, and that the likelihood of your obtaining an earnest attention is greatest, when the intellect is not stored with the scheme and the details of Christianity. There may be many amongst yourselves who, by a constant attendance on the preaching of the Word, through the having received a religious education, or the having associated with religious people, possess considerable acquaintance with the details of redemption, and who, if catechized on the points of faith, could give a most accurate account of original sin, and atonement, and justification; and with all this you may know nothing of vital religion, the intellect being informed, and the heart left untouched; and we assert of those of you who may answer this description, that if you were laid on a sick bed, and sent for a minister, he would in all probability find you more inaccessible to his message, harder to approach, and offering greater resistance to impression, than if there were little or none of that store of religious intelligence in the chambers of the understanding. The clergyman, at best, can only speak to the head; it remains with God Almighty to carry the Word from the head to the heart; but, when the head is already occupied by the truths which the clergyman has to advance, you must all see that there is scarce any room for the exercise of his office, and, that since he can only shoot into the understanding the feathers of those arrows with which its walls are hung, he can have little reason to hope that the shaft will so penetrate as to lodge in the affections. The man already knows all the minister can tell him; and thus, speaking on a human calculation, the message can have little or none of that arresting and grasping power which it might have had, if it had come down upon the sick man as news from a far country; or, if in his hour of weakness and failure of cherished expectation, it had struck on his ear with all that beauty and force which belong ordinarily to glad tidings that reach us in the season of depression. So that religion accumulated in the understanding will often serve as a rampart thrown up around the heart; and whilst ignorance would have left a clear spot for the introduction of the promises and threatenings of the gospel, information permitted to remain as an inert mass will block up those avenues through which the announcements of the Bible might have made their way into the soul's inmost recesses. And now you will perhaps say, that we are thus giving ignorance such an advantage over knowledge, that it will become prudent men, since they cannot change the heart, to take heed that they inform not the head; but it is altogether a man's own fault, if gospel truth remain in the intellect, and go not on to take possession of the affections. If there be one of you who knows thoroughly well the whole plan of salvation, but who has nothing more than an intellectual religion, we should like to look over what may be called the elements of his knowledge, and see whether he can stand acquitted of the charge of hindering his own conversion. It is a part of your knowledge that you are bound to pray earnestly for the influence of God's Spirit. Do you thus pray? It is a part of your knowledge, that it is your duty to detach yourselves from those habits and associations which are opposed to God's word. Do you labour to effect this detachment? You have the intellectual persuasion that you must be lost, unless Christ heal your moral disease. Do you act as you would do, if you had the intellectual persuasion that you must speedily die unless you betake yourself to this or that physician? We would ply any one of you who has head knowledge, and nothing more than head knowledge, with this kind of examination; and we are sure that if there were anything of candour in your replies, they would furnish an ample demonstration that man is himself chargeable with detaining truth in the intellect, when it ought to go forward to the heart, and that it is simply through his not making that use of religious knowledge which he would and does make of any other sort of knowledge, that he fails to become spiritually as well as intellectually a Christian.

And whilst we can thus fasten upon man the whole blame of his religion being purely intellectual, it is no advocacy of the advantages of ignorance to expose the dangers of head knowledge. If a man refuse to acquaint himself with the truths of the gospel, arguing that since he can only gather them into the head, he had better avoid what may prove finally detrimental, we tell him that in neglecting means he asks miracles, and that therefore, whilst thinking to decline danger, he provokes condemnation. We are far enough from saying that he can carry truth into his heart, and cause it to engage all the affections in its service; but what he cannot do he may be instrumental to the preventing being done, and he may have chained to the head what he could not transport to the heart. So that with no fear of advancing what can be misunderstood or misapplied, unless wilfully and of set purpose, we recur to our statement as to the perils of an intellectual religion. We regard these perils not as accessory or merely possible, but as inevitably resulting from merely head knowledge. The mind which has long been stored with truths the most momentous and interesting to man, but by which it has not been otherwise affected than by an historical fact or scientific deduction—that mind must acquire an habitual indifference to the gospel, harder to be overcome than avowed infidelity. The man who has sat year after year under the preaching of the gospel, and who may have drawn from the sermons which he has heard a most skilful acquaintance with the scheme of redemption, why, the very dealing through this lengthened period with Christianity as he might have done with astronomy or chemistry, attending the disquisitions of a lecturer, and bearing away new pieces of intelligence, which were all to go to the upholding and completing a theory—we are bold to say that in thus treating Christianity he has gradually stripped it of its power of attack, or rather, has so gradually hardened himself against the impressions which it is calculated to make, that through none of its ordinary workings can he be roused to struggle for salvation. And thus it will be quite true, that the man, to all human appearance, would be more accessible to conviction, if he were without the head knowledge. We can seldom have a seemingly less hopeful subject, towards which to direct the engines of the gospel, than the man whose intellect has been the grave of a thousand sermons, into whose understanding, as into a prison, from which there was no passage to the heart, have been gathered the various books and chapters of the Bible. There is an awfulness, and a majesty, and a sweetness in the truths of Scripture, which cause a minister to feel, as he draws near the sick bed, that God has put a mighty weapon into his hands, and that now that the fascinations of the world are withdrawn, and the disturbing forces of time and sense are made from the pressure of disease to act at disadvantage, he may have good hopes of exciting to anxiety and leading to a Redeemer; but when he finds that there is lying one before him who is just as well versed as himself in the theory of Christianity, who has perhaps had knowledge enough to be the great controversialist of a neighbourhood, and who could distinguish with a mathematical nicety between heterodox and orthodox, who all the while may have never received the truth in the love of it—oh! it is then more deeply than at any other time that the minister will feel the little likelihood of any effectual work being wrought, and observing that he can but repeat a trial which has been made a thousand times, and has a thousand times failed, this precept will recur to him, and cause a melancholy foreboding—" Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul."

Now, up to this point we have confined our remarks to the case of unconverted men; and it may be thought at first sight, that intellectual religion can never be attributed to the converted; yet if you examine with a little attention you will perceive, that in respect of every man, there is a likelihood of the understanding outstripping the affections, so that many truths may be held by the intellect which are not known in the experience. Now, look, for example, at the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not possible that a renewed man should fail to give his unqualified assent to the truth that the death of Christ was an expiation for sin, so that he will unreservedly hold the doctrine of the atonement. He will have no hesitation as to the facts, that every transgression deserves an infinite punishment, and, that, unless punished in the Surety, must be punished in the transgressor. But all this, you observe, is purely intellectual. The truth may be thus held, but yet held only in the understanding; and the question is, whether the believer lives in the daily and hourly experience of this truth—whether as fast as sin is committed it is carried to the blood of the atonement, and whether, therefore, the opening of a fountain for human defilement is a fact which has only gained the assent of the intellect, or one in which the heart feels a deep and abiding concern. And if, whilst you put forth an unhesitating acknowledgment that the fountain has been opened, you do but dwell, as it were, continually by the margin of its flowings—if you are not in the habit of marking sin as you commit it, and then of presently applying to the purifier, that you may be cleansed from the newly-contracted stain, we assert that the intellect is in advance of the experience, and that you hold the truth in the understanding more than you hold it in the heart. And thus, again, there must be with every real Christian an intellectual holding of the truth, if we are to live each moment in a realised dependence upon God; that we are to cast our burdens upon the Lord, that we are to refer to him our every care, our every want, our every anxiety. You will find this admitted frankly and with gladness by all who profess themselves disciples of Christ. But we want to know whether, in respect of the providence of God, as well as of the priesthood of Christ, the intellect is not often in advance of the experience. There may be an unqualified admission by the understanding of the noble truths, that not a sparrow falls without our heavenly Father—that though the Creator have to throw his inspections over the unnumbered worlds of immensity, he attends, as if with an undivided solicitude, to the affairs and sorrows of the meanest of his creatures. But unless a man continually act on the admission; unless indeed he carry his every concern to the Almighty; unless he live in the momentary habit of unbosoming himself to God, so as to ask his counsel in each difficulty, his support in each trial, his guardianship in each danger, why, we contend that the understanding has outstripped the heart—in other words, that the intellect is in advance of the experience; and there are, we suppose, but few Christians who will venture to deny, that they are chargeable with this inequality of pace in the understanding and the heart. We may put it to those of you who live most in the enjoyment of the privileges of godliness, whether the truth of God's providence is not more received in the intellect than realised in the experience—whether, that is, there be not a broader and deeper acknowledgment than there is employment of the facts, that the hairs of our head are all numbered, and that if in all our ways we acknowledge him, God will not fail to direct our paths. But this is nothing less than fastening on the best Christians the possession of a religion which, to a certain extent is intellectual; and we cannot doubt that with respect to the doctrines which have been, and others which might be alleged, there is with all of us the outrunning of the heart by the understanding, so that we know truth better than we feel it. If so fast as truth is admitted into the undertanding it were embraced by the affections, and therefore woven, as it would be, into the practice, we might almost be reckoned perfect Christians—at least, there would be in us an element of perfection which we can hardly look to attain—the maintenance of an unbroken uniformity between what we know and what we do. But if an exact sameness of truth in the understanding and the affections be a difficult, if not an impossible attainment, it will still be true, that there is great danger in the difference of rate, and that it is a Christian's prime business to labour at compliance with the precept of our text. We will just show you what we think the consequences of the intellect being in advance of the experience. If you know a doctrine whose power and preciousness you do not feel—and this is, in other words, the outstripping of the heart by the understanding—then you receive that doctrine only as an unconverted man receives it, and you must be chargeable even in a greater degree with its detention in the intellect, when it ought to be sent on to the affections; and there must be produced something of the like effect in two cases. You strip the doctrine of energy, by allowing it to remain inert in the understanding; you reduce it into a dead letter, and thus you grieve the Holy Spirit, who intended it as an engine by which you might carry on the conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil; and we need not tell you, that what grieves the Spirit must sensibly affect your well-being as Christians. Besides, in all your religious intercourse with others, the probability is, that your conversation will take its measure from your knowledge, and not from your experience. Take the case of a preacher. The preacher, and we suppose it to be his duty, will press upon his congregation the amount of truth which is known to himself, whether or not it be felt by himself. The man who admonishes another, and who desires to bring that other into acquaintance with the gospel, he will pour in upon him whatever he has ascertained of the doctrines of Christianity, and will never pause to determine whether he keeps himself in his announcements within the bounds of his own experience, or whether he is not dealing up to the limits of his knowledge. He will tell nothing of whose truth he is not assured; but the understanding being in advance of the heart, he may tell much whose value he has not personally ascertained. And what will be the result of this recommending and enforcing truths of which we do not realize the power? Why, there is a species of deception in the process, which cannot fail to produce injury. It will be taken for granted, that we ourselves feel the importance of what we recommend to another. If we speak to our fellow man of the duty and the privilege of casting care upon God, it will be concluded that the performance of the duty is our own object, and the enjoyment of the privilege our own delight; and just in the degree that the intellect is in advance of the experience, there will be error in this conclusion, and we shall therefore virtually be hypocrites. When I speak up to the extent of my knowledge, if that knowledge outruns my experience, I represent myself as attaching value to certain truths of which, after all, I have not tasted the preciousness. And what is this but representing myself as a more thorough believer than I am? And what again is this but the playing the hypocrite, though I may have no distinct purpose of palming a false estimate upon others? And if the excess of knowledge over experience thus makes it almost certain that in attemping to instruct others we shall virtually be hypocrites, you have only to remember how hateful is hypocrisy in every degree, and under every disguise, to the Almighty, and you will have no difficulty in discerning the signal danger of allowing the intellect to outstrip the heart. It is true, you may say, we will avoid the danger, by abstaining from all endeavour to instruct, but you will thus again be neglecting a positive duty—and is not this perilous? You may say, 'We will never speak beyond our experience,' and this will secure us against the alleged risk; but since your experience comes not up to your knowledge, you would thus be guilty of keeping back truths which God has given to be advanced, and you would hardly then think, that the danger which you incur would be less than the danger you avoid. So that we leave you no way of escape; view the matter in what light you will, and the same fact is presented, namely, that so far as the intellect is in advance of the heart, the well being of the Christian is in jeopardy, and that if, therefore, any one of you as a true Christian values peace and security, then his constant aim and his constant prayer will be, that whatever of religious truth finds its way into the understanding may be sent onward at once to the affections, and that thus the precept of Moses may be sedulously and continually obeyed—"Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul."

We have said enough to prove to you, that what we term an intellectual religion—a religion which rests in the intellect—may have place amongst converted men, as well as amongst unconverted. We have further shown, though upon this point it were easy to be more diffuse, that in both cases well being is perilled, and that in proportion as we know but do not feel, we increase the likelihood in the one instance of final perdition, and in the other of piety being sickly and dwarfish. We hold it to be your duty to acquire religious knowledge, for it is your duty to search diligently the Scriptures, and to attend regularly the preaching of the Word; and whilst you are bound to acquire knowledge, it is, as we have shown you, your own fault, if the knowledge be confined to the head, and push not on instantly to the heart. The knowledge is of such a description, that you must be perpetually taking pains to resist the admonition which it conveys, otherwise it would assuredly so tell on the feelings and the practice that you would be led to a genuine repentance and a genuine faith. Would to God that we might all be moved to the "keeping the heart with all diligence," forasmuch as "out of it are the issues of life!" Why is it that the service of God is "perfect freedom?" Why is it that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward?" so that though the tasks which are given for our performance are just those to which human nature is most averse, the believer finds duty a privilege and takes delight in obedience? Simply because vital religion does not rest in the intellect, but domesticates itself in the heart. The alone secret of the matter is, that the heart is on God's side. It is not painful to the miser, and yet it seems opposed to flesh and blood, to labour, and watch, and consume his days and his nights, and wear down the body with privation and toil. And why not painful, except because he loves money, because money has his heart, and because what is done at the bidding of the heart must always be done through inclination, and therefore always done with pleasure? And it is even the same with the commandments of God. These commandments seem burdensome, so long as they have not travelled beyond the understanding; but they lose their grievousness as they make their way to the heart; and when the direction of our text is fulfilled, we incline to God's testimonies, and obedience, which was a duty, becomes most strictly delight. It is the principle on which we act which gives character to our feelings; and he who is moved by love—and this it is to have the precept in the heart—cannot fail to find pleasure in that to which he is incited. And therefore we again say, would to God we might be moved to the "keeping the heart with all diligence!" Oh! it is a great thing to feel it our privilege to perform our duty! And this it is which God designs us to follow, when he directs us to lodge his commandments in our affections. "My son, give me thine heart"—this is his demand; and he who complies with this demand, finds it his meat and his drink to do the will of his Father which is in heaven. Oh! you libel godliness, and throw on it the foulest of calumnies; when you represent the man of piety as compelled to be perpetually thwarting his every desire, and as therefore living in one unbroken series of self-denials and mortifications. We tell you that if ye be Christ's in deed and in truth, ye will find a pleasure such as ye would not barter for the most vaunted and cherished enjoyment of earth, in serving God and promoting his glory. You will not perform your duties as a slave who fears the lash of a task-master, but rather as a child, who seeks the smile of a parent. You may run the round of human gratifications, but nowhere will you have found such delight as in obeying God, though that obedience be the resistance of nature. Not in vain, not in figure, not in parable, has the wise man declared—"Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." And if you marvel at this—if you reckon it inexplicable, if not incredible, that there should be pleasure in self-denial, happiness in resistance, we give you the solution by telling you, that you will do with alacrity and cheerfulness what you do with all your heart, and that the real Christian—may God make us all such!—is one who is always striving to live out the injunction, "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul."

THE GROUND OF INFIDELITY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, MAY 6, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."—John iii. 20.

IT is often a good way of arguing, to reason up from natural things to spiritual. There is so striking an analogy between the dealings of God in the world of matter and those which are made known to us in the world of spirit, that we may regard the things of nature as an alphabet by which are told out to us the nobler and more precious things of Christ. And it were well if this analogy were more kept in mind, so that men might not imagine for themselves a mode of treatment as subjects of God, which is altogether different from what they experience as subjects of an earthly monarch. They seem for the most part to proceed on the supposition, that, though placed under the gospel, they may accept it or reject it, just as their own inclinations dictate, as though it were not a fearfully certain thing, that all who have ever been brought within the sound of the gospel will be tried by it at last, whatever the treatment which it may have received at their hands. It is not left to every man's choice in a Christian land, whether or not he will be subject to the gospel; subject he shall and must be, so as through obedience to obtain its rewards, or through disobedience its penalties. Neither is this a circumstance peculiar to the gospel; it rather belongs to the analogy ordinarily alleged to all laws which rest on sufficient authority. It is not a matter of option with a man who resides in a kingdom, whether or not he will be governed by the statutes of that kingdom. If he violate the laws of the land, it will avail him nothing to plead, that he never intended to take those laws as his guide. He cannot ward off an indictment, by urging that he took some other code as his rule, and that he does not choose to be tried, except by some statute-book which he has made or selected for himself. But if this be the case in human laws, it must be a hundredfold more so in those whose original is Divine. A man may resolve that he will have nothing to do with the gospel, that he will take natural religion, and natural religion alone, as his guide. He may put from him revelation, and declare himself a follower of reason. But there is no such ability of choice, as is thus most arrogantly assumed. No doubt the man, if he choose, may make something else than the gospel the rule of his life; but the solemn fact is, that the gospel, after all, continues the rule by which he shall be tried. When he appears at the judgment-seat of God, the judicial processes will have distinct reference to the dispensation beneath which it pleased God to place him, and not that under which he shall have chosen to consider himself. The inhabitant of a Christian land may in every respect live as a heathen; but when he stands at the tribunal of his God, he shall not be dealt with as a heathen. It would avail him little to say, 'I acted up to the light of nature, and I never professed to be led by any other light.' The absurdity would be the same as if in one of the courts of law an Englishman should plead—'I acted up to the laws of Japan, and I never professed to follow any other.' God's authority, as a legislator, admits of no dispute; and though a Deist may argue, that he is thoroughly obedient to the law which he has adopted as his rule, yet, since God has sent out another law, his boasted obedience is flagrant disobedience; so that in place of being accepted, because he has carefully followed the rule of his own choice, he must be condemned, because he has wilfully rejected the rule of the Almighty's appointment. And we think, that the gospel is thus brought before us under a most important and striking point of view, when represented as the system by which we shall be judged, though it may not have been the system by which we have lived. When God has made a new revelation of himself, it is not optional with us whether we will keep fast to the faith. His authority is distinctly set at nought, by every resolve to choose, as it were, our own dispensation; and the sin of having rejected the gospel would overwhelm a man through eternity, even had he thoroughly acted out the precepts of that natural religion, which alone he may profess to have taken as his guide. Here, however, comes in a question of no small importance, having to do with the causes why the gospel is rejected. If all who have rejected the gospel shall be condemned for that rejection, whatever may have been their diligence in working out their own system, it must follow that the rejection can in no place be pardoned; so that infidelity, to use the expression, can never be pleaded for as unavoidable. Is this the case? Can it be contended, that a man is necessarily blameworthy for being a Deist, or for being a Socinian? May he not have sat down with a calm and decided wish to investigate truth, and have given himself to the study of the evidences or the doctrines of Christianity, and yet have risen from his patient and painstaking inquiry, confirmed in his scepticism, or strengthened in his heresy? We know how common and specious it is to maintain, that a man may have endeavoured to believe, and yet not have been able. We are met by a vast parade of liberal sentiment; we hear much of candid mistake—of men who are quite willing to be convinced, provided only they could find ground of conviction. The case is urged as one of most possible occurrence, that of a man of honest and straightforward intentions, actuated by a simple desire to arrive at the knowledge of truth, but, though giving himself to the search in an earnest and teachable spirit, unable to receive Christianity, or to find in it the doctrines which are ordinarily found. Then we are asked, whether fault can fairly be fastened on this unwitting and necessary disciple of error; whether we can be harsh enough to maintain, that he who has striven vigorously, but unsuccessfully, to emancipate himself from falsehood, shall be dealt with hereafter as one who has set at nought the truth. We have a simple statement to bring forward in reply to these specious representations. We dare not take the blame off from men, and throw it upon God. If man may so endeavour to believe, as to be blameless for not believing, God has made his not believing unavoidable, and therefore is himself the author of the infidelity. Unless, therefore, we are prepared to adopt the blasphemous opinion, that God himself prevents men from attaining a knowledge of truth, though they desire it earnestly, and seek it rightly, we must pause before we suffer ourselves to be carried away by the well-sounding theory, that there may be such things as candid mistake and involuntary error. The man who rejects shall be condemned for rejecting; and therefore it is certain, that the rejection has not been unavoidable. It may sound illiberal, it may savour of the uncharitable, to contend that the case is an impossible one, of a man wholly wishing and striving, but in vain, to escape from the meshes of infidelity: but it is better to be what the world calls illiberal, and what men call uncharitable, than to entertain an opinion which can only be supported by considering God himself as the Author of sin through placing any of his creatures under the invincible necessity of continuing in sin. We shall not be easily moved from the conviction that a man has only himself to blame if he continue in unbelief whilst we find our Lord in the verse preceding our text emphatically declaring, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;" and in our text yet more clearly marking out the mainspring of infidelity, "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

Now, we shall not enter at length on all those topics which might easily and naturally be evolved from the passage. Your attention might be engaged with the contrast which seems drawn between the gospel dispensation and every dispensation preceding it. It is represented as light in opposition to darkness. Or we might speak on the emphatic and unreserved denunciation, "This is the condemnation," showing how fearfully the having been privileged to hear the gospel will aggravate our doom if after all we reject it. But the great point which solicits examination is the connection here asserted between wrong faith and evil practice. You are familiar with the fact that faith is to be read in men's actions; you are taught by Scripture to conclude that where actions are evil faith cannot be genuine. But the representation of the text may be said to be the converse of this. The practice is here set before us as influencing the faith, and not the faith the practice. The creed is exhibited as depending on conduct rather than the conduct on the creed. Men prefer darkness to the light; they hate the light; they wish to continue ignorant of the truth, uninformed as to the things which Jesus came to disclose. On the simple account of their deeds being evil, they fear lest those deeds should be reproved. So that in our Lord's explanation of the causes of infidelity you find none of those courtier-like allowances for candour and ingenuousness and unavoidableness, with which the statements of a more fashionable and time-serving theology not unfrequently abound. The whole secret of rejection is resolved into unholiness of life; and in place of exceptions being made in favour of this or that description of persons,—of the worshipper of reason who cannot quite satisfy an over scrupulous intellect, or of the disciple of error who strives nobly, but unsuccessfully to emancipate himself from an involuntary bondage, there is but one account brought forward as applicable unreservedly to all classes of unbelievers: men will not come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved. It will, we think, be greatly for your profit if we carefully examine this alleged cause of unbelief or infidelity. We shall endeavour to make good two points, and we shall ask your close attention to each: the first that the Jews to whom our text was originally applied hated the light and would not come to it because their deeds were evil; and the second, that just the same explanation may be given of infidelity, whether open or concealed, amongst ourselves.

I. Now, so far as the Jews were concerned, it must be so clear as scarce to need any demonstration that their national rejection of our Lord was the result of their national depravity. There was something in the genius of Christianity which opposed itself at once and irreconcileably to the habits and feelings and prejudices of the people. If you put out of sight the records of profane history, which bear an explicit witness, we gather enough from the incidental notices of the inspired historians to assure us that when Christ came upon earth Judea was overrun with almost universal profligacy. It is scarcely possible to imagine language more awfully emphatic than fell on many occasions from the lips of him who was meekness itself, when the voices of the chief men amongst the Jews called forth his indignant rebuke. There is a soul-stirring emphasis in his "Woe unto you Pharisees!" "Woe unto you Sadducees!" And no man of common feeling can read the denunciations without a consciousness that a fierce, unblushing depravity must have reigned amongst these teachers and rulers of the people ere the lowly and compassionate Jesus could have poured forth such a torrent of vehement reproach. It was moreover amongst the great men of the land that the rejection of Christ was most determined and unfliching. By their example, by their incitement the common people were led to desire his crucifixion; so that it is quite fair, without attempting to push the inquiry into the details of the national character, to set it down as an ascertained fact that the national rejection of Jesus took place at a period of great national depravity, and that consequently, if ever infidelity may fairly be traced to the simple cause marked out by our text, that cause existed so largely among the Jews that the effect was to be looked for in its highest exhibitions. We have only then, since the elements of the argument are thus furnished by the circumstances of the case, to inquire into the connection between the depravity and the infidelity, and, so far as the Jews are concerned, the assertion of the text would be fully borne out.

Observe, then, that it is the striking characteristic of the religion of our Lord, wherever and whenever promulgated, that it allows of no truce with the passions or infirmities of our nature. Proffering, indeed, a pardon for every iniquity, it, nevertheless, after a singular but most powerful manner, makes that very pardon the ground of a demand that "men should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world;" and, hence it must always come to pass that the apparently wonderful phenomenon will be exhibited, that the very same men who would have shrunk away from Christ, had God sent Him into the world to condemn the world, do equally shrink away from Christ now that the design of his being sent has been the saving of the world. He did, indeed, come on an embassage of mercy, but then he came equally on an embassage of holiness, and where there would have been open arms to receive him, had he left unmolested the rivalry and the haughtiness of earth, there can be nothing but opposition when he comes to say—"unless you will renounce what has been long dearly cherished, you shall have no part in the blessings which I come to bestow." And all this general reasoning applies with special force to the particular case of the Jew. His sensuality and his pride had been fostered and flattered by the expectation which he had entertained of a long-promised Deliverer. Fastening on what was gorgeous in the prophetic delineations of Messiah, and overlooking what was humiliating, bringing to bear on the transmitted writings of his ancestry a carnal imagination which could in no degree appreciate spiritual benefits, and which, therefore, delighted itself exclusively with the splendid visions of conquest and sovereignty, the Jew lived in anticipation of a season when, triumphing over every enemy, he should be enabled to give full scope to a licentious and arrogant spirit. Thus, there was on the part of the Jews a kind of pre-arranged resistance to the lowly and self-denying Teacher, such as can scarcely be supposed in any other community to which the gospel may be sent. It was not merely that their deeds were evil, it was that their deeds had been made more evil, had been encouraged and strengthened in evil by false views of the character of Christ; and, therefore, when the real nature of his kingdom was brought plainly before them, why, almost as a matter of course, their habits of evil doing rose up to protest against their reception of Christ. Over and above the native inclination to reject what would demand the renunciation of their fleshly indulgence, there was the acquired inclination to receive as Messiah one only who should answer to the false but alluring description. Had their evil deeds been in no way associated with their expectation of Christ, they would still, as we shall afterwards perceive, have powerfully militated against their acknowledging the pretensions of Jesus of Nazareth; and, seeing that their evil deeds were mixed up with their expectations so closely the one with the other, there can be nothing fairer than to affirm of the Jews, that "they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." It was not that, standing amongst them in poverty and humiliation, the Saviour did not put forth tokens sufficiently clear to convince his kinsmen after the flesh, that he had indeed come commissioned by God. Was it, think ye, candid error, was it involuntary mistake, when the grave had given back to the world the body of Lazarus, animated afresh, and new strung with energy, which sat down to compass the destruction of the Being by whom the life-giving word had been uttered? It is, we think, most worthy of remark, that there seems to have been no attempt on the part of the Jewish elders to deny the miracle, or explain away its wonder; on the contrary, they unreservedly allowed the greatness and wonderfulness of the marvel. The Chief Priests and Pharisees gathered together and said—"What do we, for this man doeth many miracles?" You might have supposed that such an admission of his power would have been followed by an admission of his pretensions, whereas, precisely an opposite result is produced, and solely, as we contend, through their deeds being evil. For what did they say? "If we let him alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." You observe the point on which we have insisted: the fear of being a despised people in place of a dominant one, the dread that their flattering dreams would be falsified, and that after gazing delightedly on the pictures of Judea as supreme amongst the kingdoms, wealth and greatness flowing in as the undisputed portion of their sons and daughters, they should be compelled to look upon their land as an oppressed and subjugated district—these were the stirring motives which ranged themselves as antagonists to the witness of miracles, and which, urging on the Pharisees, so that they grew more furious in proportion as the proofs of Christ's mission grew more convincing, brought about the extraordinary result, that Christ Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not." And thus we trace with sufficient clearness the strong and close connection between the evil deeds of the Jews, and their rejection of Jesus as the Christ. They literally "loved darkness rather than light." They were so wedded to their own system of a temporal prince leading on his countrymen to certain victory and widespread possession, that when a counter-system was proposed to them of a spiritual monarch heading his followers, and the keeping under the body and the master sin, all the warmest feelings in their hearts rose up in opposition, and prompted the throwing scorn on this pretender to the Messiahship of Israel. Analyze the matter as nicely as you will, you cannot avoid allowing that it was just because the darkness of the false system favoured and fostered their evil deeds, whilst the light of the true system poured upon them shame, and required their banishment, that with a tenacity which excites our surprise, and a fierceness which moves our indignation, the Jews scorned the Saviour when he stood amongst them and displayed the credentials of a marvellous and manifold miracle. And thus it was that there was no deficiency in evidence. It was not that, after patient and candid investigation they had been unable to receive the proofs of Christ's mission. Infidelity possessed the people and reigned undisputed amongst them, with here and there a solitary exception. The grand secret of the national rejection lay, after all, in national depravity; and never did a truer saying flow from the lips of him who was truth itself, than when in the early stages of his ministry, looking around upon the elements of scorn and antipathy—elements which were easily to be discovered in the pursuits and prejudices of a dissolute and power-loving nation, he pronounced that darkness would be preferred to light, because their deeds were evil; saying alike of the Pharisee and of the Sadducee, of the Priest and of the Levite, and of every class who rejected him—"Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

II. But we have already hinted, that even if we threw out of calculation those special circumstances which cause national depravity to be linked with national infidelity, there would remain sufficiency of proof, that it was their evil practices which moved the Jews to the rejection of Christ. We think, however, there cannot be occasion to detain you with separate demonstration on this point. The instant the thought is abstracted from the peculiar situation of the Jew, at the period of Christ's appearing upon earth, he may be said to stand nearly in the same position as ourselves; and if we, therefore, now go on to show you, that in the present day men hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved, we shall at one and the same time have made good the assertion of which we have not yet adduced proof. And it were well to observe, that the phraseology of our text, and its context shuts out many of those reasons which might possibly be adduced, as illustrating the connection between the doing of evil and of remaining in unbelief. You will remark, that the gist of the passage lies in the fact of men hating the light, avoiding the light, prefering the darkness; and we therefore have to ascertain, what it is which produces the preference—not merely the remaining in darkness, but the liking to remain in darkness. There is a difference here. For example, it admits of no question, that indulging in known sin indisposes a man for the operations of the Holy Spirit. For there is no truth better ascertained than this, that although the Spirit of God "bloweth where it listeth," certain species of conduct are calculated to intercept, and others to make way for its quickening, regenerating influences. Hence it clearly follows, that immorality of life tends necessarily to the producing or perpetuating infidelity in creed, inasmuch as by specially disqualifying man for being the subject of spiritual influence, it goes far towards excluding him from that Divine help which alone can make him acquainted with the truths of religion. Thus the fact of the deeds being evil is the great producing cause of another fact—namely, that moral darkness continues undispersed by the clearest shinings of moral light. The deeds serve as curtains which shut out the light, and therefore perpetuate the darkness. But reasons of this description, though illustrating the connection between infidelity and immorality, hardly apply to the matter in hand. We have to do with men's choosing, with men's preferring, the darkness. We must, therefore, advance nothing which does not suppose deliberation, the actual making an election, which does not bring the unbeliever before us as a calculating agent, and not as an involuntary. And if we affirm that no man is an infidel, except through his own free and unrestrained choice, we shall not transgress the bounds of scriptural truth. I care not how you may perplex the question with subtle allusions to the secret decrees of the Almighty; but one position we shall never abandon, that whosoever finally perishes, shall perish only because he has chosen to perish. We are quite content to acknowledge the existence of many and deep mysteries; and we feel it bound on us as fallible short-sighted creatures, not to attempt to penetrate our Maker's unrevealed purposes; but at the same time it is distinctly to be remembered, that in respect of the most intricate and inscrutable subjects, certain points may be advanced as intelligible and as demonstrable as that two and two make four. It is thus in regard to the origin of evil. I am instantly overwhelmed if I attempt to travel into the depths of a subject so awfully mysterious; but that God created only what is good, and that all which is not good originated with the creature—I can keep fast to this simple position, and I do not find that the inexplicable difficulties which throng about me if I attempt to know more, at all interfere with my faith or my comfort, so long as I am contented with knowing so much. It is thus also in regard to predestination. No man can make any progress in clearing up the question, why God should elect one man and not elect another, or how salvation can be placed within the reach of all, and yet only some receive the power through which it may be grasped: yet in this as in the other case, there is a very clear, and very simple truth, knowing which, we know enough, however curiosity might crave to know more. No man perishes through God's election; all who perish perish through their own. This is the unassailable position within which we entrench ourselves; and though we may be in a land of darkness and of pitfalls, the instant that we travel further, we have sufficiency of light and straight paths for our feet, whilst content to keep our searchings in the lines which have been drawn for us by the Almighty. In every case, therefore, we must hold, according to the language of our Lord, that men love darkness rather than light; for every one that doeth evil hateth the light. And what determines their choice? What influences their election? The answer given by experience is, that viciousness of practice produces this strange preference of darkness to light. Men will not come to the light; they love darkness lest their deeds should be reproved. Let us show you, by a brief illustration, the justice of this reply. What produces Deism, or the complete denial and rejection of revelation? weakness of evidence? deficiency of proof? absence of testimony? Nothing of the kind. Men generally begin by wishing to prove the Bible a "cunningly devised fable;" and this at once is going more than half way towards believing the Bible a "cunningly devised fable." They feel if the Bible be true, their deeds must be reproved; and hence they have a direct interest in disproving the pretensions of Christianity. The heart is engaged in bringing out a negative result, and consequently the head, always influenced by the heart, will allow no force to the arguments which support, and great force to the objections which assault Christianity. Who then can marvel at the issue? The man rises up from his solemn sitting in judgment on the evidences of revealed religion with great parade of assertion, that he has given to the matter a candid inquiry, and will declare himself unable to discover the Divine origin of the religion of Jesus. However unwillingly, therefore, he must settle down into the Deist. He has used all possible pains to be convinced, and, at the least, he cannot be blamed for rejecting, which is altogether involuntary. Oh! away with this dressing up of obstinacy as candour, this idolizing of wilfulness as unavoidableness. No man, we feel assured, ever arrived at the disbelieving of Christianity who did not start with a desire of disbelieving Christianity. And whence sprang the desire? whence came it that the man wished to get rid of a system which had been handed down from his fathers with the voice of a long ancestry witnessing its Divinity? Whence, in all probability, but from the consciousness that Christianity was irreconcileably his antagonist, vehemently and unalterably opposed to his practice? Herein lies the secret of open infidelity. Determined not to have their deeds reproved, men feel that it will be for their advantage to prove the Bible false; and thus they make it at the very outset, well nigh impossible that they should believe the Bible true. It is just the same with practical infidelity. The men of the world have a secret wish against becoming men of piety; they would view what is called conversion as a positive calamity. You could not bring them a more confounding piece of intelligence than if you were to assure them on some indisputable authority that a week hence, or a year hence, a total change would pass on their characters, and they would join themselves to that morose and unamiable set of men who denounce avarice and pleasure-hunting, and enjoin self-denial and mortification of the flesh. They are well aware that they cannot become what is styled religious without renouncing much which they love, forsaking much which they follow, and doing much which they dislike; and there exists in consequence within them a decided disinclination to piety; so that it is scarcely harsh to affirm that they would not become pious if they could. Oh, my brethren, the question, "wilt thou be made whole?" is a question which, after all, is very difficult to answer. And wherefore this decided and deep-rooted dislike to moral renovation? Wherefore is it that, amid all profession of being disciples of Christ, the heart should be thus steeled against genuine discipleship, so that the bare idea of substance succeeding to the shadow, the reality taking the place of semblance, scares the nominal professor as if it were a vision of wrath and calamity? There is no account whatever to be given, save that where there exists no knowledge, properly so called of vital Christianity, there does exist a sufficiently clear perception of what Christianity demands to awaken a consciousness that a hundred favourite enjoyments must be foregone, a hundred close associations rent, if a man would step boldly across the frontier and place himself under the banner of righteousness. Therefore, conversion, in place of being desired, is literally and actually dreaded. It would be the most ill-omened message, if you told the money-maker, in the midst of his accumulations, or the pleasure-hunter in his revelries, or the child of ambition as he toils up the step of preferment, that a day would soon dawn, bringing with it such a change in his feelings and character, that wealth would be looked upon as dross, and voluptuousness spurned as an enemy, and distinction fled from as dangerous and destructive, that he would "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ" his Lord. Can it be denied—if, indeed, there exists this strong repugnance to conversion—can it be denied that men hate the light and will not come to it lest their deeds should be reproved? Is it not by their own election, their own free and unconstrained act, that they continue amongst the aliens in place of being gathered into the household? And, if it be incontrovertible that darkness is actually loved, chosen, preferred, then it is just as incontrovertible, according to our own preceding showings, that the grounds of the love, the choice, the preference, are to be sought in actions which characterize the life. So that, precisely as we showed you with reference to professed infidelity, we show you now in regard to practical infidelity. It is a thing of man's own choice; and the choice results from man's own conduct. And thus the decision of our text, harsh as it may sound, and bigotted and illiberal, is, in every case, substantiated. The Jew and Gentile, the Deist, who openly denounces revelation as a forgery, and the worldling who gives it the homage of formal respect and then the contempt of a God-denying life, to all and each of these may the text be unreservedly applied to each as he passes by in insolent scorn, or in his cold neglect, we may justly say: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

We have not much to add, as the subject, we trust, has been sufficiently illustrated. We only desire that you may carry away with you the truth that God has erected no barrier against the salvation of a single one amongst you. So that, if there be an individual who shall hereafter be reckoned with the lost, his own choice,—his own choice, and not the Almighty's predestination, will have to place his name in the fatal list. Oh! we are persuaded that the heartrending discovery at the judgment, that which shall produce a gnashing of teeth, and wringing of hands, it will just be that blessedness had been placed within arm's length of the lost, and that they had obstinately refused to put forth a hand to grasp it and appropriate it. When the righteous go rejoicingly away, soaring to their heritage, the cutting consciousness to the wicked gazing after them as they themselves are being driven into torment, shall it not be "that might have been our portion, had we not madly and deliberately chosen this?" It is an alleviation to suffering to be able to reflect: "at least it cannot be charged as any fault of one's own; I have no option; and, therefore, terrible as the portion is, I have no cause for self-reproach;" but "this is the condemnation," this gives guilt its enormity, this shall throw a dread over the judgment-seat, and this shall fan the fire and tighten the rack, "that men love darkness rather than light." They would not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved. It is a bold thing to say, but comparatively a man might bear what he knew himself predestined to, but the frightful thing is to bear what he shall know that his own choice, and that alone has entailed. "The choice!" let men of the world listen for an instant. Ye make a choice, ye choose riches, ye choose pleasures, ye choose honours. This is your account of the election; this is a false account. The election is for eternity; the things between which you determine are the glory and the greatness, the ignominy and the anguish of immortality. And, now, boast ye your wisdom? vaunt ye your calculations? And, when asked what is it ye have chosen? make ye true answer, noble creatures as ye are, deathless and imperishable. What is it that ye have chosen? Make ye true answer; no varnishing, no evasion. "We have chosen the scourge when God offered us the crown; we have chosen the prison when God offered us the palace; we have chosen the fire when God offered us the river of life; we have chosen hell when God offered us heaven." Oh, let me make you all feel this! Is there one of you who will go away and forget this—that all who perish, perish by suicide? Free as the air, the sunshine not more liberal in its distributions, pardon and acceptance through the blood and righteousness of Christ, are offered to the unworthiest of the children of men. Ye are not shut out at all. God "waiteth to be gracious." "Waiteth!" Your Master is a suitor, entreating you, beseeching you. Avoid ye, then, the condemnation of our text; bring it not down wilfully upon yourselves—and, except wilfully, it can never be incurred. I know there is a great deal to fight against; there is actually, as we have said, a repugnance in many to the being converted; they would rather not be made to give up sin. Now, do you think this an exaggeration? Why, I have known young persons refuse to be confirmed, for instance, simply because they thought that, if confirmed, a new vow would be upon them to renounce the world; and they wished not to have further reasons for renouncing what they had already so strong inclination for keeping. I have known other persons who, on somewhat of the same principle, have refused to partake of the Holy Sacrament. They have been conscious that by appearing at the Lord's table, they shall give a fresh pledge of dedication to his service, and they do not wish the dedication, and, therefore, they keep away, as though fearing that God might take them at their word, and make them true Christians. There is, then, much to struggle with, but God's grace is sufficient—sufficient, my brethren, to overcome the repugnance to the being overcome. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well;" seek, in the instituted channels, the gifts of God's Holy Spirit, that light and not darkness may be above you and around you.

THE DIVINITY AND PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY GHOST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, MAY 13, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."—John xvi. 7.

WE commemorate at this season in the services of our church the event which fulfils Christ's promise in our text. The Holy Ghost who is described as the Comforter was poured out on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and Jesus, who had ascended up on high, sent down the Spirit, and thus verified his words whilst on earth. We have often occasion in our public addresses to refer to the offices of the Third Person in the Trinity, and to ascribe to his agency the moral change of which every man, if he would be saved, must be the subject. But we feel it important that we should sometimes speak of the Person himself, as well as of his offices; that we should lay down with clearness and perspicuity the Scriptural doctrine of the Divinity and Personality of the Holy Ghost. Men's notions are often vague on these points. When we speak of a man's spirit, we refer to a quality, attribute, or property of a man; and the risk is very considerable, that when we speak of God's Spirit, we may attach just the same idea to the expression, and thus make the Holy Ghost not a Person but a property of Godhead. Suppose, then, we endeavour to give you clear views on this fundamental truth—that the Holy Ghost is not a property but a Person of the Godhead. When this has been done, when we shall have shown that the Comforter spoken of in our text is a Person of the Godhead, we shall be better prepared to examine the assertion of Christ, that his own departure was expedient as preliminary to the descent of the Spirit—"It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

Now, let me remind you that the prime thing to be shown—for it is upon this that men's ideas are ordinarily confused—is, that God's Spirit is a distinct Person of the Godhead, and not like man's spirit, a mere property or attribute. And if we are to make out this point on the authority of Scripture, we must turn to the Inspired Volume to examine whether such things are said of the Spirit, or such things ascribed to the Spirit, as consist with the opinion that the Spirit is a Person, but are opposed to the opinion that the Spirit is a property. But, surely, even the expressions of our text attest strongly the fact of the personality of the Spirit. If the Spirit were nothing more than an attribute of the Father, if it were not truly distinct from the Father, how could it be sent, given, or bestowed? Every one must see that that which can be sent by the

Father must be distinct from the Father; and that, therefore, at least, God's Spirit must be something more than a mere attribute of God. You will further observe, that it is said of the Holy Ghost, "He shall teach you; he shall bring all things to your remembrance; he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak." Are not these personal acts and offices? Can they be ascribed to an attribute? Can an attribute speak of himself? What is he himself unless there be personality; unless, that is, the Holy Ghost be a subsistent intellectual being truly distinct from the Father and the Son? Again, you will find that the Bible invests the Spirit with such faculties as prove that Spirit a Person. The Spirit is said, to "search all things; yea, the deep things of God:" therefore, the Spirit hath understanding. You are bidden not to "grieve the Spirit:" therefore, the Spirit hath affection. We are told that the Spirit said unto Peter, "Behold, three men seek thee:" and, therefore, the Spirit hath speech. And could it be declared—unless it were the set purpose of the inspired writers to deliver enigmas—could it be declared of a mere attribute that it had understanding, and affection, and speech? Are not these faculties and acts strictly personal? Once more, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is spoken of in exactly the same form of speech as blasphemy against the Son; but, unless the Holy Ghost as well as the Son be a Person, what fitness would there be in a comparison of blasphemy against the one with blasphemy against the other? In like manner, the Holy Ghost is represented to you as the object of faith and of worship conjointly with the Father and the Son. Thus, in the form of baptism prescribed by our Lord, we are baptized into the name of the Holy Ghost just as much as into that of the Father and of the Son. If, then, the Father and the Son be Persons, can the Holy Ghost be a quality? Can we be baptized into the name of two Persons and of one quality? We may add, that the fact of the Spirit descending like a dove and resting upon Christ implies personality. That which has no subsistence cannot well be represented under a visible shape. At Christ's baptism there was truly a remarkable exhibition of the Trinity. The Son stood upon the earth in the form of a man; the Spirit, taking the shape of a dove, hovered in the air; and the voice of the Father came forth from the firmament declaring—"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And if the Spirit of God were nothing more than an attribute or property of God, who could understand the representation, that whilst God was in heaven he detached, so to speak, a faculty of himself, which faculty took visible shape, and performed the actions of an intelligent being?

Now, these are some of the reasons, for we are compelled to omit many, from which we contend that acts attributed to the Spirit prove the personality of that Spirit; they are acts or offices which cannot, without the most strained and over-wrought construction be attributed to an attribute or quality; and inasmuch as they agree most strictly with the notion of a Person, we conclude that God's Spirit is no property of God, but a Person of the Godhead. And there is yet more to be said. You should observe the studious accuracy with which, when the Holy Ghost is spoken of, that article is used which marks personality. Spirit is a word of the neuter gender, and yet when the Holy Spirit is referred to, the article used is not "it," but "he." Thus, in the chapter from which our text is taken—"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." Again, in the 14th chapter of St. John—"The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." Why this violation of grammar? If the Holy Ghost had been only a property "it" would have been used, and the rules of grammar observed. But, as if to show us that the Holy Ghost is a Person, "he" is employed; grammar being set at nought that a great truth might be implied. I do not bring before you that well known text, "There are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," because there rests so much doubt on the authenticity of that text that it will hardly be admitted in argument. But, when Christ declares, though on a separate occasion—"I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me, and when the

Comforter is come, he shall bear witness of me;" the assertion is nearly tantamount to that of the disputed text in St. John. And it must be admitted that Father, Son, and Spirit are spoken of as separate witnesses; a mode of speech which is wholly inconsistent with the idea that the Spirit is only an attribute of the Father, and which, if the Father be a Person, must, we think, be allowed to prove that the Spirit is also a Person.

We have yet, however, to show you the Divinity of the Holy Ghost. Proving that Spirit a Person and not a quality does not of course prove him a Divine Person. Turn, however, to the scriptural proofs of the essential Deity of the Holy Ghost, and you will find that such proofs strengthen at the same time those of his personality. And first, we may observe, generally—and every student of the Bible will attest the truth of the observation—that whatsoever God is said to have spoken, performed, or made, that also the Holy Ghost is said to have spoken, performed, or made. And if, as we have shown you, the Holy Ghost is a Person; and if, of this Person, the same words, works, and acts are affirmed as of God; does it not irresistibly follow that between the beings denoted by the names of God and of the Holy Ghost there must be an essential identity or unity? We will, however, adduce one or two particular arguments which appear conclusive on the point that the Holy Ghost having been proved to be a Person, must be also a Divine Person. When St. Peter rebuked Ananias, he said—"Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" adding immediately afterwards—"Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God." So that lying unto the Holy Ghost is the same thing as lying unto God. Therefore, the Holy Ghost must be God. Again, according to St. Matthew, Christ said—"If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils." But according to St. Luke—"If I by the finger of God cast out devils." Thus, the power of working miracles might be referred equally to God and the Holy Ghost. Does it not, then, follow that the Holy Ghost is God? Besides the incommunicable properties and perfections of the Divine nature are attributed to the Spirit. St. Paul speaks of Christ offering himself through the eternal Spirit. Hence eternity is ascribed to the Spirit. David asks—"Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?" Then the Spirit is Omnipresent. St. Paul says—"The Spirit searcheth all things:" therefore, the Spirit is Omniscient. It is further asserted by Eli—"The Spirit of God hath made me:" and by Job—"By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens." And since creation is thus referred to that Spirit, that Spirit must be Omnipotent. Who can this person be? For the spirit is no mere property, we have demonstrated that. Who can this person be? If he is Eternal, Omnipresent, Omniscient, Omnipotent, can you deny him to be a Divine person? Can he be a creature, and yet possess the perfections which belong only to Deity? Must it not rather be admitted, unless you will convict the Scriptures, either of absurdity or of blasphemy—of absurdity in describing an attribute as though it were a person, or of blasphemy in ascribing to a finite being the incommunicable properties of the infinite—that unless you would do this, there is no alternative but that of giving in your adherence to the orthodox doctrines, that the Spirit is a person, and that person Divine.

And there is yet another text to be adduced which may be reckoned as a compendium of our foregoing argument. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, says: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" To dwell in a building is a personal act; it cannot be ascribed to a property; and thus the personality of the Spirit may be inferred from the assertion that this Spirit dwells in believers. But the indwelling Spirit is represented as making man the temple of God; and is it not then certain that if the presence of the Spirit in the temple, be the same thing as the presence of God in the temple, that the Spirit is none other than Divine, a person of the blessed Godhead?

There is, however, one thing worthy of being noted, in order that we may meet a common objection. You cannot deny, and you must all observe it yourselves, that in many passages of Scripture, the Son and the Spirit are spoken of in terms, which seem to convey the idea of inferiority to the

Father. Thus, in our text, where Christ declares that he will send the Spirit; and in other places where the Father is said to send both the Son and the Spirit, we must allow that the language employed appears to sanction the notion that the Three Persons are not strictly co-equal. He who can send another would seem of necessity superior to that other. To be sent, marks ordinarily a dependence and subjection, which do not consist with our ideas of perfect equality. The king sends the ambassador; the ambassador cannot send the king. But, observe, when it is not as an agent in human redemption that the Spirit is spoken of, he is represented to us as absolute Deity; but when he is introduced as bearing a part in the rescue of this creation, he is undoubtedly exhibited as subordinate both to the Father and to the Son. We know that it was required in order to our deliverance from the consequences of sin, that one person in the Godhead should humble himself, so as to lay aside his glories, and that afterwards when he had returned to his throne, another person in that Godhead should continually deal with the corrupt nature of the fallen, and make way for the blessings which the Mediator had purchased. But certainly, the second person condescending to humble himself, does not prove him inferior to the first; nor does the fact, that the third person consented to be occupied with the renewal of the polluted and depraved, show that he was unequal to the first or the second. It is thoroughly consistent with the doctrine, that the Three Persons are co-essential and co-equal, that we should suppose their undertaking different offices in the work of our redemption, which offices should be subordinated the one to the other; and if the nature of this work of redemption be such as it palpably is, that subjection of offices is unavoidable; then it is also unavoidable that the parties who undertake these several offices, will be sometimes spoken of as though they differed in rank, the office so giving its own character to the being who bears it, that whilst in reality there is nothing but subordination of offices, there shall be apparent inequality in the office-bearers themselves. And we give you this as a general rule in reference to the seeming inferiority of the second and third persons in the Trinity to the first. If you examine carefully, you will find that there is no other difference between the Three Persons than a difference in office. Keep out of sight the business of human redemption, and investigate what the Bible says of the Father, Son, and Spirit, when these Three Persons are not acting for the salvation of our race, and you will detect no shadow of inequality; each Person being equally described as Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent. But when the discourse turns—and we need not tell you that this is the theme of the great part of the Bible—when the discourse turns on the delivery of sinners by a grand scheme arranged by the Persons of the Trinity, then, undoubtedly, the Son and the Spirit are sometimes characterized by terms which seem to indicate inferiority to the Father. It was thus Christ declared, "My Father is greater than I." He spake as Mediator, as God-man, not as God. As Mediator, he was subject to the Father; he had agreed to be sent, whilst the Father was to send; so that he could with perfect truth declare himself inferior to the Father, because there was subjection of office; and yet elsewhere assert, "I and my Father are one," because there was equality of Divinity. We know that there is a subordination of offices; and therefore we also know that when the Divine persons are described by their offices, there may, as there must be an appearance of difference. Then we have, on the one hand, the clear statements of equality, and on the other, the appearances of inequality, unavoidably produced by difference in office, and therefore not implying a difference in rank. And if equality is distinctly asserted, and inequality only so far apparently introduced as was rendered unavoidable by subordination of office, you will all see that there is nothing in such forms of expression as that of our text which can interfere with the glorious doctrine of a Trinity of co-equal, co-essential persons of the Godhead. On the contrary, knowing the origin of the appearance of inequality, we are confirmed by it, rather than weakened, in our belief that as truly as the Father is God, so truly is the Son God, and so truly is the Holy Ghost God, and yet that they are not three Gods but one

God. Yes, it may in our text look as if some being inferior to the Father and the Son were spoken of, seeing that the speaker assumes the power of sending him to the church, but we have already produced evidence enough of the Spirit's equality with the other persons in the Trinity; and therefore, knowing that his office was to bring him down to tabernacle on this earth, we bow before him as every way Divine, and we expect a person of the Godhead in the being who is thus announced by the Redeemer, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

But now we pass on to examine the saying of our Lord, that it was advantageous for his disciples that he should depart from amongst them, seeing that his departure was necessarily preliminary to the coming of the Comforter. There are two things in this saying which will strike you as requiring explanation: why, in the first place, was it needful that Christ should depart before the Comforter could come? and why, in the second place, would the apostles be gainers, on the whole, if Christ were withdrawn, and the Holy Ghost vouchsafed?

And first, it is not to be doubted, that had the Spirit of God at any time been absent from this creation, or that had he at any time failed to carry on amongst men the great work of moral renovation, there had never, since man first threw the shroud of darkness and of death around the earth—there had never been sent up an acceptable prayer unto God; and never had a soul broken loose from the bondage of corruption and won immortality without as distinct an out-putting of the power of the Holy Ghost as produces the like result under the Christian dispensation. For it must also be remembered, that though there was a cloudy dimness about its announcement, the gospel came into force on the very instant of human transgression, and that all the apparatus of rescue which since the crucifixion has been developed and offered to the whole family of man, was brought to bear upon the deliverance of sinners, when as yet there had been no tidings that the Word should be made flesh; and we may not therefore suppose that the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the first communication of the Comforter. We are assured, on the contrary, that this Divine agent had all along been busy with the children of men, and that whether it were in the struggles of conscience or in the fastening of faith on a far off sacrifice, he had from the beginning asserted his supremacy as the renovator and upholder of alienated nature; and we can only therefore think that the Pentecostal effusion was the bestowment in larger measure of what had been already vouchsafed. The Spirit came down as at this season with a fulness of power which had not attended his foregoing descents; and not only—for this it is important to observe—not only was there an increased manifestation, but the Spirit came specially to unfold and apply the perfected redemption, and assist the first preachers in making it known to the world. You cannot mark the gross ignorance of the work of Christ which pervaded the minds of the apostles up to the day of Pentecost, and contrast this ignorance with the clear knowledge which they afterwards displayed, without determining that the Spirit was given to illustrate and explain the scheme of salvation, and that though man had previously been under his influences, those influences had not enabled him thoroughly to comprehend the value of the mediatorial work; so that we must consider the promise of sending the Comforter as a pledge that the Holy Ghost would come to lay open and apply what had been wrought out by the Saviour, and that thus he could specially enter on the office assigned him by the covenant of redemption. But if the promised coming of the Spirit were his coming to unfold and make efficient the work of mediation, it follows of course that this coming could not take place until the work itself was altogether complete. We have spoken of a subordination of offices in the work of our redemption. The Son covenanted to effect all that was required for the pardon and acceptance of sinners; and the Spirit covenanted to dispose and prepare sinners to receive the benefits of Christ's obedience and suffering; the work of the Spirit being moreover so dependent on the work of the Son that the renewing in fluences were to be purchased by the agony which was endured and by the blood which was shed; and you see that it was required by this subordination that the work of the Son should be finished before the work of the Spirit commenced. The Comforter was to come to apply Christ's work as one of the fruits of Christ's passion; and therefore it follows, according to our text, that if Christ went not away the Comforter would not come. For you would do well to bear in mind the thorough voluntariness of the endurance of Christ; so that even when flesh had been assumed, and he moved amongst the disloyal and rebellious, there was no compulsion to go on with the undertaking. It is one of the noblest truths laid down to us in Scripture, that our blessed Redeemer was thoroughly independent upon death, and that as God humbled himself in becoming man, so did the man humble himself in entering the grave. The departure was every jot as voluntary an act as the coming. We are at no liberty to question that our Lord might have preserved his human nature undecayed through long centuries, keeping it unbroken whilst generation after generation rose and flourished and fell. The whole matter of our redemption might have been kept in awful suspense, and man might have remained unredeemed, because his covenanted Redeemer went not up to the altar of sacrifice. We assert nothing but what was made possible by the joint power and purity of the Saviour, when we say that the approaches of death might have been resisted through a succession of ages, and that the immortal man might have still been upon the earth, the child of centuries past, the heir of centuries to come. But if Christ had thus failed to depart, the Spirit could not have been communicated. The Spirit indeed might have been present in that degree, and with those influences in and with which he was amongst the apostles whilst they were slow of heart to believe and understand; but he could not have been present in his office of Comforter, opening and applying the work of redemption. This office was subordinate to that of the Intercessor, and could not be entered upon until Christ had died, and risen, and ascended; and therefore the coming of the Spirit was dependent on the departure of Christ—was, in fact, so procured by that departure that there is the strictest accuracy in every syllable of the saying: "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

And if it were thus indispensable that Christ should depart before the Spirit could come, it would be very easy for you to see why it was for the advantage of the apostles that their Master should leave them. We know well enough that Christ's absence was in itself no benefit to the church; for we are assured that whatever is most glorious and most palmy in the successes of Christianity stands associated with the return of the Saviour to the scene of his victories. The church must be considered as in a state of widowhood whilst separated from him who is emphatically described as the bridegroom and the husband; and we cannot therefore think that it was expedient for Christ to go away on the principle that his absence was more beneficial than his presence. If it had consisted with the arrangements of redemption that Christ should have remained with his apostles whilst the Comforter had been also imparted, we cannot doubt that his remaining would have been expedient and that the joint presence of the Son and the Spirit, which is, in fact, what we look for at the season of the church's triumph, would have outweighed in advantageousness the single presence of the Comforter. But the simple thing asserted in the text is that the apostles would be gainers by the departure of the Son, seeing that without this departure there could be no coming of the Spirit. It is not implied that Christ's absence in itself was desirable; it is only stated that since his absence was necessary in order to the presence of the Comforter, expediency or benefit was on the side of his departure. And if you call to mind what has been demonstrated in former parts of the discourse, you will immediately acquiesce in the accuracy of this conclusion. Had the Comforter not come, then the work of redemption must have been incomplete, seeing that his coming was to be a consequence of its completion. Was it not then expedient that Christ should depart and send the Comforter, inasmuch as otherwise the deliverance of man must remain unachieved, and no overthrow take place of the deep-based dominion which Satan had erected on this earth? Had the Comforter not come, though even redemption had been completed, it would have been virtually ineffectual; the work being powerless to individual salvation till explained and carried home by the influences of the Spirit. Was it not then expedient that Christ should depart, seeing that unless he departed the Spirit could not come, and unless the Spirit came his death would be fruitless, that dense ignorance still keeping possession of the whole human population which remained even in the apostles themselves up to the time of the day of Pentecost? For we are not concerned with answering the inquiry, if such should be proposed, why Christ might not have continued with his church, and the Comforter have also been imparted. This is nothing more than asking why it hath pleased God that Christianity should make its way through toils and through disasters in place of being advanced from the first to an unlimited sovereignty. For who doubts that had such been the will of the Almighty, Christianity, so soon as proclaimed, might have overrun the earth, and that, instead of eighteen centuries of woe and of crime, centuries during which the kingdom of Messiah has often only just maintained itself against the assaults of infidelity—in place of this years and ages of righteousness and joy might have rolled over this creation, and men might have lived in the holiest of brotherhoods beneath the visible sceptre of the Prince of Peace? We have no answer to give but the appointment of God to all questions which have to do with the long permission of anarchy and misrule. We can only adopt, and it is our duty to adopt, the language of our blessed Redeemer—"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." It may strike us as mysterious that a redeemed world should still be left under the tyranny of its oppressors, and that so soon as the battle of principalities and powers had issued in the discomfiture of evil, Christ did not assert his triumph in the face of the universe, sweeping off misery and wickedness from the polluted and long oppressed earth. We readily confess that there is something beyond our explanation in this, for our earth might by a casual observer, be almost taken for an unredeemed earth, so great are still the wretchedness and sadness and sin by which it is continually traversed, and we might be tempted to exclaim in the language of the prophet, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no Physician there? Why is not the health of the daughter of our people recovered?" But it should be enough for us to know that for wise ends he with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years, hath permitted and ordered that, although vanquished, Satan should retain for a season, a great power against men; that the church should live only in struggles, continually on the point of being overborne by the adversary, even as though it were not the strength of Deity in which she fought, nor the breath of Deity which fanned her banners; and knowing it thus to have been contrary to the good pleasure of God that immediately on the completion of redemption the Son and the Spirit should dwell together in the church; we know also it was for the good of the church, that the Son should depart and the Spirit should come. Since both could not continue upon earth, expediency was on the side of the absence of the Son, which making way for the presence of the Spirit, would complete the arrangements for human deliverance, and cause the whole of that instrumentality to be brought into action, by which on a coming day, Son and Spirit uniting to do wondrously, evil shall be grasped and flung from this earth, and the tenantry of its every section shall combine to rear a universal temple, and to raise one anthem of deep and holy gratulation.

On this account—on account of the incompleteness of redemption until the Son had departed, and on account of the insufficiency of redemption until the Spirit came to explain and apply the work, it was for the benefit of the apostles particularly, and of the church generally, that Christ should leave the world to return to the Father. And these reasons being the very weightiest and most pregnant, we can require nothing additional for clearing up these sayings of our Redeemer—sayings addressed to his followers when they were saddened and overcome at the prospect of being left alone in a hostile world : "Nevertheless I tell you the truth"—Oh! how touching that expression! Was he likely to deceive them? Would he put them off with a false statement at so critical and so affecting a moment? "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

There does not now remain any point which requires examination. We have established, as we trust, the Divinity and personality of the Comforter; and we have shown you why the departure of Christ was a necessary preliminary to the coming of the Spirit, and therefore expedient. And if such be the dignity of the Spirit that he is none other than a Person of the Godhead; and if such be his worth that it was expedient for the apostles that Christ should depart in order that he might come, will ye not hearken to his whisper, and cherish his every motion with the sensitiveness and carefulness of beings who feel themselves in contact with Deity and dealing for immortality? Ye know not what ye do when ye resist or grieve this Holy Spirit. If ye strive against conscience, if ye withstand an inclination to prayer, if ye live in known sin, if ye indulge impure thoughts, ye resist and grieve the Spirit; and in so doing ye fight against God. Yes, ye fight against God. The worm of the earth is in arms against the Omnipotent, and rushes to the onset whenever a prompting of the Spirit is neglected, whenever a suggestion of the Spirit is disregarded. And which of us is there who has not thus fought against God? Oh the secret warnings that we have despised! The inward admonitions which we have all slighted! The aspirations after God and holiness which we have all kept down and deadened! Every one of us must have cause to exclaim with the Psalmist—"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, and take not thy Holy Spirit from us." In deep contrition and humility we are all bound to acknowledge that we have done this wickedness, refusing to hearken to the voice of the charmer, and walking in the way against which we have been warned. But our past failures may be used as incentives to care and diligence for the future. Let us humbly and heartily resolve that henceforwards we will strive to listen incessantly to the "still small voice," obey every motion, bow to every rebuke, and remove every hindrance. If we would know the Holy Ghost as the Comforter, we must be in good earnest to war with every lust, and if we are resolutely on the Lord's side, if we are content to give up all for Christ—no reservations; a fraction kept back nullifies the whole—if we are content to give up all for Christ, then will this Divine Agent indeed comfort our hearts; he will comfort us with the assurance of victory; he will comfort us with the prospect of immortality; in trial he will comfort by giving strength; in temptation, by making a way of escape; in death by fastening on us "the whole armour of God." This is comfort. Alas! that any one of us should "hew out the broken cistern" when he may draw from "the fountain of living waters;" that any of us should "spend money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not," when the invitation is, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Let us conclude with prayer:—"O God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not, send down thy Holy Ghost as a Comforter to each one in this assembly. Grant to all of us so to appropriate by faith the blessings which thy dear Son purchased by his death, that we may be full of peace and of joy, adorning thy doctrine whilst we live, and ready whenever thou shalt call us hence to enter into the joy of our Lord."

THE POWER OF GOD'S ANGER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, MAY 20, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."—Psalm xc. 11.

THIS 90th Psalm, part of which you have just been singing, and which, from its touching reflections on the uncertainty of life, is most fitly introduced into the Burial Service of our church, bears the title of "A Prayer of Moses the man of God." The general supposition has been, that it was composed by the great lawgiver during the sojourn in the wilderness, and no doubt the sentiments which it contains derive additional solemnity from the idea, that he who uttered them was at the time surrounded by thousands who were wasting away beneath the displeasure which transgression had provoked; and yet, notwithstanding the authority of the Talmudical writers, who ascribe the nine following Psalms, as well as the one before us, to Moses, there seems good reason for doubting whether he were indeed the author. In the time of Moses most of the persons mentioned in Scripture lived to an age far exceeding the standard of threescore years and ten, or fourscore years, which in this 90th Psalm is assigned as the limit of human life. This will seem to warrant us in supposing that the Psalm was composed about the time of David, when the life of man had become fixed, in general, to its present amount.

The question, however, of the authorship of the Psalm is rather critical than practical. Whoever was the auditor to whom the Spirit spake, we are sure that the words were dictated by immediate inspiration, and we find in them a pathos and a power that sufficiently prove their origin. Our text is one of those passages of Holy Writ which may be viewed under various lights, but found impressive and instructive under all. You are not to think that each passage of Scripture must necessarily bear one fixed and definite meaning, and that uncertainty would be introduced by varieties of senses; on the contrary, the instances are by no means rare, in which a verse is susceptible of numerous applications, each so practically important that we cannot doubt its having entered into the mind of the Spirit. The verses seem to be constructed with exquisite skill, in order that they might adapt themselves to successive ages, and to the trials and the circumstances of different men. They possess a power of accommodation which may itself be given in proof of Divine origin. He who indited them must have had unbounded knowledge of the moral wants of the myriads of every generation, and unbounded skill in so fashioning the maxims that they should meet want after want, though there be no apparent connection between the two. There is such an elasticity in Scripture, that its words may be drawn out till they spread themselves over the business of an enormous population; and moreover, it has such a compressibleness, that its chapters and books seem to have been designed solely for the solace of a solitary heart.

We make these remarks before entering on an exposition of our text, because it would be difficult to decide on one interpretation of a passage, in preference to any other. It would seem that whether a man be converted or unconverted, he may with equal truth take the passage to himself. There is a slavish fear of God, and there is also a filial fear. The one belongs to the man who knows God only as Creator—the other to him who through the the Spirit of adoption has been led to know God as a Father. Which fear, then, is it which the Psalmist gives as the measure of God's wrath: "Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath?" We cannot decide between the two, for either will equally serve as a standard, and therefore both, according to our preceding remarks, may be considered as intended by the Spirit. But the difficulties of interpretation are not done with, so soon as we have settled that the passage thus admits of double application. There are more senses than one in which God's wrath is according to his fear, whether that fear be the fear of a slave or the fear of a son; and we cannot perhaps better divide so intricate a subject, than by taking the two great classes of mankind, the lovers of the world and the lovers of God, and endeavouring to show you in each case the force and the applicability of the text. You see, then, the subject and the plan of our discourse. Two great divisions of men are to pass under review—the lovers of the world and the lovers of God; and we are to inquire in regard of both what meaning lies in the words of our text—"Who knoweth the power of his anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

I. We begin, then, with those who as yet have turned no willing ear to the invitation, "Be ye reconciled to God," and we are to listen to this thrilling question circulating through their ranks, "Who knoweth the power of God's anger?" It is clear from the tenor of the question that it admits no reply but a negative; and yet is it not wonderful, that with all that tracery of vengeance before our eyes which is stamped on this desecrated creation, and with all that record of overwhelming calamity which history points out to us as marching in the train of sinfulness, it should yet be true that we know comparatively nothing of the power of God's anger? What then? If I view the whole family of man, exiled from happiness for the offence of their forefather, do I know nothing of the power of God's anger? If I look upon our globe, going down with its teeming tenantry into the sepulchre of waters—if I survey the cities of the plain, drenched with the fiery showers—if I behold Jerusalem turned up by the ploughshare of the Roman, and her sons and her daughters scattered like the ashes of a furnace—if I see God exemplifying with an awful fidelity the words of the Psalmist, "A fruitful land maketh he barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein"—know I nothing of the power of the anger of the Lord? We are certainly not required to maintain, that from these and the like tremendous exhibitions we can gather no just notions of the might of God's wrath; but we must conclude that, were this wrath to go forth, in its unshackled and unmitigated strength, the fearfulness of its workings would so vastly transcend that of any wherewith we have yet been made acquainted, that there would be no proportion whatever between our present apprehensions and those which the mind would then be forced to entertain. For we may safely affirm, that in every outgoing of anger which has yet been brought under human inspection, mercy has walked by the side of vengeance, moderating the blow which could not wholly be restrained. We have as yet no practical acquaintance, except with God's temporal judgments; nothing has been afforded us, beyond dim and shadowy notices of the portion reserved for the impenitent, when the earth shall have been destroyed by the fires of the judgment. We believe that there is no such thing on this side eternity as unmixed and undiluted wrath. We are utterly at a loss, and it is to turn ourselves adrift on an ocean without a compass, when we seek to figure with precision what unmitigated wrath may be. We have had no experience and no specimen. It may be indeed, and we think it is, that the most overpowering notion of future torment is drawn from the idea that there shall hereafter be no restraint upon anger. We speak of hell as a place of banishment from the presence of God; it is the very expression of the Judge, "Depart from me, ye cursed;" but we do not and we cannot mean, that God is in no sense present in hell. God is everywhere, and it is not possible that for a solitary instant God should cease to be everywhere. He does not abstract himself; nay, it were altogether to deny his nature to speak of his abstracting himself from that prison-house, wheresoever it be, in which they who have died in their rebellion shall know the gnawing of the worm and the scorching of the flame. But we might perhaps venture to say, that in a certain sense he is not present in all his attributes. He is present in his justice, in his hatred of sin, and in that vengeance which especially belongs to him; but he is not present in his love. There is no continuance of that wonderful admixture of properties which has prevented the total extinction of our race, and which has never yet allowed of our realizing the full meaning of judgment without mercy; and we suppose that if imagination be allowed its most unlimited sweep, it can furnish no imagery which shall go beyond the simple idea, that there are no drops of mercy in the wine-cup of God's future indignation. So that if we had ever seen the workings of unmitigated wrath, we might be able to affirm that we knew the power of God's anger; but inasmuch as these workings have not yet been displayed, we necessarily remain ignorant of what wrath by itself is able to effect. And from this ignorance—an ignorance, be it observed, which arises from knowledge, and not from inattention—from the knowledge that, while confined to the present scene of being, wrath is never shown to us in the nakedness of its strength; from this ignorance, we say, we may derive our first illustration of the words of our text. No man knows the power of God's anger, because that power has never yet put itself forth to its full stretch. Is there, then, no measure of God's wrath—no standard by which we may estimate its intenseness? There is no fixed measure or standard, but there is a variable one. The wicked man's fear of God is a measure of the wrath of God. If we take the man as he may sometimes be taken, when the angel of death is upon him, when the sins of his youth and of his maturer years throng him like an armed troop, and affright and afflict him—when with all his senses keenly alive to the rapid strides of bodily decay, he feels that he must die, and yet that he is not prepared—why, it may come to pass—it does occasionally, though not always come to pass, that his anticipations of the future are literally tremendous. There is such a fear and such a dread of that God into whose immediate presence he feels himself about to be ushered, that even they who love him best, and charm him most, shrink from the wildness of his gaze and the fearfulness of his speech. And we cannot tell the man, though he may be just delirious with apprehension, that his fear of God invests the wrath of God with a darker than its actual colouring. On the contrary, we know that "according to the fear so is the wrath." We know that if man's fear of God be wrought up to the highest pitch, and the mind throb so vehemently that its framework threaten to give way and crumble, we know that the wrath of the Almighty keeps pace with this gigantic fear; for if this wrath could be compassed by our anticipations, it would not be that tremendous thing which we have shown it must be in its results. And this, which is one of the most obvious interpretations of the passage, is at the same time one of the most striking; for we know well enough, that fear is in the habit of magnifying danger, and that those things to which we have looked with an overpowering dread whilst distant, prove not, when they actually arrive, one-tenth as tremendous as imagination had pictured. There is a property in our minds which causes the objects seen through the mist of its own anxieties to appear, for the most part, on an exaggerated scale. The immaterial part of man differs in this respect from the material.

The instant it is the wrath of God towards which fear is directed, that which is every way infinite in its height, in its length, in its breadth, cannot by any possibility be exaggerated, let fear become more sensitive, more distressing, more overwhelming. The awful matter of fact is, that the object of this fear is not to be out-talked by the fear itself. "According to the fear, so is the wrath." We may therefore pause, and beseech those amongst you who are still living at enmity with God seriously to lay to heart this simple, but solemn truth—that fear is no microscope, when turned towards the wrath of your Maker. It cannot give the true dimensions, but it is utterly impossible that it should give larger than the true. If it has ever happened to you—and there is not perhaps a man on the face of the earth to whom it does not sometimes happen—if it has ever happened to you to be crushed with the thought, that a life of ungodliness must issue in an eternity of woe, and if amid the solitude of midnight and amid the dejections of sickness there pass across the spirit the fitful figures of an avenging ministry, then we have to tell you, it is not the roar of battle which is powerful enough, nor the wail of orphans, which is thrilling enough to serve as the vehicle of such a communication; we have to tell you, that you fly to a refuge of lies, if you dare flatter yourselves that either the stilliness of the hour or the feebleness of disease has caused you to invest vengeance with too much of the terrible. We have to tell you, that the picture was not overdrawn which you drew in your agony. "According to the fear so is the wrath." Fear is but a mirror, which you may lengthen indefinitely, and widen indefinitely, and wrath lengthens with the lengthening and widens with the widening, still crowding the mirror with new and fierce forms of wasting and woe.

We caution you, then, against ever cherishing the flattering notion, that fear can exaggerate God's wrath. We tell you, that when fear has done its worst, it can in no degree have come up to the wrath which it images. We hold fast to the position laid down in the first clause of the text—that no man whilst resident upon earth can know or comprehend the power of God's anger; and when you then demand whether there be no measure whatever, whereby this anger can be estimated, we beseech you take the sinner's fear of God, just when everything conspires to work up that fear into unearthly energy, and we tell you that the wrath is in proportion to the fear; and we thus prove to you, that no calculation can go beyond the truth, and that if we have not a measure which takes in the whole of the dimensions, it is only because those dimensions enlarge with the enlargement of that which we apply to determine them, for the question may be asked in all eagerness and with all anxiety, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" And this answer must be wrung out from the throes and torments of disquieted souls—"Even according to thy fear so is thy wrath."

Now, it is easy to pass from this view of the text to another, which is in a certain sense similar. You will always find that men's apprehensions of God's wrath are nicely proportioned to the fear and reverence which are excited in them by the name and the attributes of God. He will have but light thoughts of future vengeance, who has but low thoughts of the character and properties of his Creator; and from this it comes to pass, that the great body of men betray a kind of stupid insensibility to the wrath of Jehovah. "There is no fear of God before their eyes." If there came down the being of another sphere, to take the survey of what is passing on this earth, it would hardly be thought that a Divine message had gone forth through its provinces, declaring that the vengeance of God should finally rest on every doer of evil. You can scarcely ever find any practical recognition, that such a message had been delivered, or that such a message was true. It might indeed be expected that a vast revolution would have been quickly brought about by a revelation which should lay open enough of the secrets of the future to assure man that sin should not pass unvisited; and yet it is not for an instant to be denied, that practically the wrath of God is not so much feared as the wrath of an earthly king or potentate. If you took the answer to the question, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" by the conduct of the majority of those before whom the object of this anger are exhibited, you could not but conclude, that in place of the power being known, the general persuasion is that there is no power at all. And where is the solution of this phenomenon? Whence comes it, that an anger literally so tremendous in might should so easily be put aside by the very beings who are exposed to its workings, while the frown of a fellow-mortal excites greater dread and carries greater influence? The whole secret lies in the fact, that "according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." Until a fear of God be excited, the wrath of God passes for nothing. It is even thus in regard to the anger of a fellow man. I care not for his frown till I see cause to suspect that it may be in his power to injure me; I am indifferent to his wrath, so long as the conviction is not forced on me, that I have reason to expect its being turned against myself. And thus, unless I have been brought from one circumstance and another to fear the man, it will matter nothing to me that he bears the repute of a powerful man, a passionate man, and a vindictive man; I shall hold on my course without the least personal concern in the vengeance which he may wreak on those who offend him; for never having seen cause to fear him, it is idle to ply me with stories of his wrath; the simple but universal maxim being, that "according to the fear so is the wrath."

And there is no difficulty in passing, in such a case as this, from the lower up to the higher. What holds good as to men holds good as to God. Nothing short of the fear of God will put life into the threatenings of God; and with all that bold and insolent indifference to the Creator's wrath, which may fairly be considered as having illustrated the question, "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" is quickly resolvable into a practical infidelity, with regard to the existence and attributes of the Creator, issuing most necessarily in a total want of fear and of reverence. And when once you have concluded that the fear of God is wanting, you can no longer look to find that the wrath of God is influential. It is an unavoidable consequence on a general state of alienation from the Creator, that the voice of his threatenings should be lost in the noise of business or the revelry of pleasure. And therefore we put it to you as a kind of striking interpretation of the words of our text, that the great mass of the world know nothing and think nothing of the power of God's anger. They act as though assured, that in place of being a mighty thing, whose lightest rising is enough to produce trembling throughout all the spreadings of the universe, it is at the best a weak thing, whose very existence may be questioned, and, if admitted, admitted only as a nice speculation. And when we would ascertain the origin of so strange and fatal a deportment, we have only to remember that the fear of God does not enter into the composition of the natural man—that at all events it exists not in any such measure that it may not be and is not quickly overborne by passing emotions. And having thus determined that the fear is wanting, we apply the principle of wrath being according to fear, and thus solve at once the mystery, why God's anger should be treated as a thing of no power. Yes, look at the crowd of the worldly and the indifferent. Can you trace in their deportment any indication of a consciousness that the anger of the Lord is tremendous—that at any instant it might break forth in all its awfulness against the proud and the unconscious and the sensual? No, you cannot gather such a consciousness from the scenes of the mart, or from the revelries of mirth. You come back, and you press upon us the question, "Who knoweth the power of God's anger?" Nay, rather, no marvel that God's wrath should be thus practically an unknown thing amid the crowd on which you have gazed. There is no fear of God in that crowd; they are "of the earth earthy." The soul is sepulchred in the body, and has never wakened to a sense of its position with reference to a holy and avenging Creator. Now, then, you may understand the absence of all knowledge of the power of God's wrath. "Who knoweth the power of God's anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

Let us glance at the third interpretation. We admit that God's anger is altogether measureless: when once aroused we set no limits to its power; hence it is not possible that the fear should mount too high: wrath keeps pace with it in its most enormous strides. But God's anger may be arrested;

and here again it is that according to the fear, so is the wrath. The fear which gave a measure of wrath, in itself gives also the measure and the degree wherein it should be executed. God willeth not the death of any sinner, but would rather that all men should repent, and turn unto him and live. Let this fear produce submission, obedience ; and the wrath which was just ready to strike is mitigated and softened away ; according as men do more or less tremble at God's judgments, God does more or less execute them. Thus the power of the anger is not to be understood, because it is altogether inexplicable. How that which is so immense and resistless should so easily be restrained and averted ; how that which is able to crush worlds is itself crushed by the cry of humiliation of the sinner, I cannot rightly understand ; but I am assured of the fact, and rejoice in the fact ; and therefore I exclaim—"Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" Who can unravel the constitution of that which, though nothing can withstand, so little can withhold? The power, indeed, is infinite ; yet according as thou dost find thyself feared, the outgoings of thy wrath are stayed.

We have not, however, space to dilate further upon this. We have hitherto considered only the servile fear of God. Let us now go on to a filial fear. We turn to those men who have been admitted by adoption into the family of God, and we seek for senses in which in reference to them, it holds good, that according to his fear, so is God's wrath. It would appear from a verse in the 130th Psalm, that true fear of God arises from a sense of God's forgiving love—"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." It is, you observe, distinctly affirmed that the fear of God is the result of being forgiven of God. Let us, for an instant, trace the connection, and then turn it to a further illustration of the text. We may admit that in transactions between man and man such a connection does not necessarily exist at all. We cannot be sure that he who forgives another will therefore bind that other firmly to himself ; on the contrary, it may easily come to pass, that forgiveness may produce presumption, and having found that he may offend with impunity, the pardoned one will go on to repeat the offence. And if you search into the reasons of this, you will quickly find that though an offender may represent himself as penitent, we have no possible way of proving this sincerity ; we cannot look into his mind, and are therefore necessitated to take him at his word ; so that however we may impose conditions on the grant of pardon, however we may make it a rule that we will not forgive unless there be clear evidence of a thorough sorrow, and a fixed resolve to amend what is faulty, it is palpable we may be most easily deceived, and that after all we must pardon on the chance, not the certainty, that there is actual repentance which will issue in reformation. Here, then, we cannot withhold the connection ; because there is forgiveness, there must also be fear. The forgiveness may be accorded without change of heart, and is not necessarily productive of change of deportment ; but the reverse of all this must be affirmed when the forgiving party is God : he pardons only those whom he hath himself made penitent : he renews the man when he remits his offences, and thus there is at once an assurance that the man becoming an altered man on becoming forgiven, forgiveness will bind him to God's service by all those ties of gratitude and affection which an act of free grace seems most calculated to produce. We show you, then a moral certainty that the man who is forgiven will fear. In pardoning his sin, God has led him to hate sin, and to hate it not only as entailing punishment, but as offensive to the being who hath loved him and rescued him ; thus the disposition of a child has entered into his soul—he fears, but it is the fear of love, fearing to sin because sin is hateful unto him with whom he hath found pardon. Then you should consider what there is in God's forgiveness of sin which is adapted to generate fear. We may say of this forgiveness that unreservedly it absolves the sinner, but at the same time unequivocally condemns the offence. The enormity of transgression is far more strikingly marked by the extension of pardon, than it ever could be by the exaction of penalty. Almost the first act of awakened men is to discover "mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace embracing each other ;" the spiritual scales have not fallen from the eye which does not trace God's vengeance against sin, in the pardon which God proffers to the sinner; his ears are not unstopped, but he still refuses to hear the voice of the charmer, which in all those accents of surpassing tenderness, which speak of guilt removed and transgression swept away, discovers not a sound as of woe and wrath and righteous indignation; neither has an altar of holy worship being reared within that heart which can gather into its chambers all the endearing token and promises of parental love, without trembling and fearing as it marks the blood of an incarnate God which is sprinkled on them all. Viewing it as forgiveness through the death of a Surety, and that Surety one who is the fellow of Jehovah, though found in fashion as a man, we read in that forgiveness itself our strongest proofs of God's hatred of sin, and of his determination to exact its punishment even to the last tittle. So that he who feels himself forgiven will find within his breast all the elements of godly fear. The greatness of the benefit conferred, the awful process by which this benefit was procured, these will be continually present to his mind, and operating upon him as powerful stimulants in the pursuit after holiness, will cause him to show to all around that he does indeed fear God with that filial fear which produces confirmity to a father's will. And all this has a direct bearing on the illustration of our text. We are endeavouring to unfold the meaning of the expression, "According to thy fear, so is thy wrath." We have shown you that true fear of God is obtained by realizing the pardon of sin; we have further shown you that on the cross of Christ is graven most indelibly, the anger of God against every working of evil. And from this it clearly follows, that he who has most of the fear of God, will have the keenest sense of the wrath of God. It is the man who lives much upon Calvary, who frequently visits the scene of the Saviour's agony, and who marks with wonder, with contrition, and with thankfulness the pouring forth of the most precious blood for the sake of his own rescue from final perdition—this man it is who will fear God with the fear to which forgiveness is parent; and who, we may now ask, can know somuch of the wrath of God, as he who is thus conversant with the emptying of that wrath on the head of the Redeemer? We may venture to affirm, that the wrath thus emptied was unmitigated and undiluted. We know not how there could be one drop of love in that cup whereof Christ Jesus drank. We know not, seeing that the final penalties of sin were all paid down in the sufferings of our Surety—we know not how, when justice was exacting from Christ what, if we repent not, it will be eternally exacting from us, there could have been any of the tempering of mercy in those fierce dealings which clothed the sun with a sackcloth of hair. Therefore the exhibition of wrath in the moment of crucifixion was that of wrath without any alloy. On this one occasion, though it may be on no other, God set forth to the intelligent creation the power of his anger; and if it were not that our affections are quickly borne down by the mysteries of Christ's death, so that we can form to ourselves no conception of the intenseness of anguish, but are quickly bewildered and confounded at the very mention of the sweat of blood and the hidings of the Father's countenance—If we could estimate—but who can estimate?—eternity condensed into a moment, and driven into the soul; if we could estimate the wretchedness, if we could weigh the burden, if we could count the arrows, and thus bring within our compass the endurances of the Saviour, there might rise up some amongst us to reply affirmatively to the question—"Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" But, nevertheless, though no one can affirm of his knowledge that it is co-extensive with the power, yet must all perceive that he carries knowledge furthest who is most deeply studious of the sufferings of Christ. And if it be undeniable that he will fear God most who is most with Christ in the Garden and on the Mount, and if it be equally undeniable that he who most scrutinizes the anguish which thronged the work of expiation will discern most of the anger of the Lord, then it will follow at once that the wrath is in proportion to the fear. I cannot, O God, pretend to measure the strength of thine indignation; but the more I occupy myself with the spectacle of this bruising and putting to grief thine only and well-beloved Son, the more do I fear thee, and the more do I perceive that thy wrath against sin must lead to enormous punishment. Hence, as I grow in thy fear, I grow also in the sense of the Omnipotence of thine anger. True fear of God springs from forgiveness of sin; the forgiveness of sin can never be realized without piercing views of the anger of God let loose against the Son of his love; and therefore knowledge of the wrath walks side by side with the experience of the fear.

Ask ye, then, "Who knoweth the power of God's anger?" No man, we reply, no man can know it, in anything of its actual intenseness. But would you know more and more of it? Then be much at the foot of the cross. "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." Behold the man, as he stoops beneath the weight of imputed iniquity, as he bows his head and yields up the ghost. The more you engage in such contemplation, the greater will be your fear of God, as of purer eyes than to look upon sin; and with this fear will grow your sense of the greatness of that wrath which must finally overtake the impenitent; and thus what will your experience be, but a confirmation of what is asserted in our text—that although, O God, we cannot know the power of thine anger, yet, O God, "according to thy fear, so is thy wrath?"

We glance, in conclusion, at one other interpretation of this text. The second clause of the verse may be considered as giving the answer to the question contained in the first. The text might thus be paraphrased: 'Who amongst the sons of men understandeth the power of thine anger?' He only who hath thy fear—he only understandeth the nature or purpose of thine anger.' And this is most accurately true in regard to afflictive dispensations—those dispensations which apparently spring from the wrath of God, and which assuredly would never be allotted, were there no sin to provoke that wrath, and rightly understood and received by none save those whose iniquities are forgiven. God must be viewed as a Father, ere the design of his chastisements can be practically discerned; and if he be viewed as a Father, there must be that filial fear which results, as we have shown you, from a sense of forgivness. So that he who fears God, he alone will know anything of the power of God's anger, for he alone will feel that afflictions are engines whereby what is hard and rebellious is softened and subdued. And thus there is a new and powerful meaning for the text. A man must be possessed of the fear of God that can at all appreciate the scope or power of those dispensations which seem stamped with the impress of anger. Hence he may be said to know the anger only from feeling the fear; and the expression is again vindicated—"Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

But enough on the explanation of the passage, whether as applied to the men of the world or to men of God. We now for one instant call upon both classes. We bid those who have as yet sought no refuge from God's wrath, Arise and flee, ere the night be upon them. We admonish others who know Christ as a Saviour, to take heed that their walk and conversation bear witness to their fear of God. Men of the world! ye may carry it bravely for a season; ye may not be disturbed by anxieties: oh! well were it for you, if in every sense according to Thy fear so were Thy wrath! For ye may bring down fear to a nonentity; but wrath is not reduced by corresponding degrees. It grows with your fears—it does not diminish with your fears. Let there be no fears—let the heart be of adamant, the sinew of steel, the forehead of brass, still the wrath is above and beneath and around you. God is no less terrible, because men are too hardened to dread him. Turn not, then, away; tremble before the Lord; and the wrath which has been already poured upon Christ shall never come down in its terrors upon you. And ye who have indeed the fear of the Lord, show by your practice, your sensitiveness to evil, your avoidance of temptation, that the fear of the Lord has indeed made you alive to his wrath. Let men see that you are not careless, because you believe yourselves forgiven, but that forgiveness has produced fear, and that fear shows you so much of the power of God's anger, that hourly, yea, momentarily, ye seek wholly to please him.

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

A Sermon

Delivered on Tuesday Morning, May 27, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

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AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."—2 Corinthians iv. 11.

The Apostle has just been giving a surprising description both of the trials and the supports experienced by himself and other preachers of the gospel. "We are troubled," he says, "on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." He thus makes an array of contrasts, setting what God allotted him to bear side by side with what God communicated in assistance; and in our text he may be said to sum up these contrasts. He condenses the varieties of trial into one phrase, and the varieties of supports into another phrase. The being alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is his general description of suffering; the manifestation in our mortal flesh of the life of Jesus is his general account of succour. But he does not so much represent the succour as afforded in order that there might be support under suffering, as the suffering permitted, in order to give occasion for the display of the succour. He was delivered unto death, in order that, with the intent that, Christ's living might be manifested in his mortal flesh. So that he may be said to exhibit himself as a kind of tablet on which were to be graven characters of suffering and affliction; those characters being designed to serve as an alphabet in which the world might read the life of the Mediator.

This is no doubt a somewhat different view of a Christian's trials from what is ordinarily given. We generally and justly speak of these trials as permitted, with the view of preparing the sufferer for the inheritance which awaits him on the other side death. It is the well being of the Christian himself which we regard as proposed by those struggles to which he is almost sure to be subjected. But our text seems to show, that mightier ends are designed to be subserved by the afflictions of the righteous. According to St. Paul the believer is harassed, assailed, and tempest-tossed; not only that his corruptions may be purged away and his graces strengthened, but also in order that opportunity may be given for the display of those powers with which Christ on his ascension was invested. And there is something very striking in the idea, that it is the life of Jesus which is manifested in the Christian. Century after century has rolled away, and he who won to himself by agony and death the lordship of this lower creation, has not visibly interfered with the administrations of its concerns. For aught that the infidel can see, the sceptre of the earth is not wielded by him whom Scripture has designated "King of kings, and Lord of lords;" and whether it be a truth or whether it be a delusion, that the crucified Nazarene came up from his grave and ascended into heaven, he can find no token or no evidence that authority has been given him, or if given is exercised. And we are not prepared to deny, we should not be borne out by the fact if we attempted to deny, that the proofs of Christ's life are not of that vivid and overpowering kind which force themselves on the attention of common observers. There is not circulating around us the like evidence of the life of the Redeemer as of the existence of a God. We can meet the Atheist on the splendid platform of this visible creation; we can go with him into the scrutiny of the curious and costly secrets of nature; we can point to beautiful arrangements, contrived by infinite skill, and to exquisite contrivances, marked by infinite wisdom; and if the lovely things and the marvellous, the sublime and the delicate, thus passing under review, do not force the Atheist to recognize and confess the existence of a God, at least we have the satisfaction of knowing, that we carry with us the great mass of our fellow men, in pronouncing on him a verdict of wilful and infatuated ignorance. But if we are desirous of convincing an unbeliever of Jesus' life, we must not take the same course as in proving to an Atheist that God exists. The time indeed shall come, when what is called sensible proof shall be given—when every eye shall behold the Son of Man seated in the clouds, and summoning to judgment. We know that it is not for ever that even in appearance this earth shall be abandoned by its rightful Lord; we know that he shall yet do more than sit behind a mysterious and impenetrable veil, directing indeed, though seemingly unconcerned with the vast machinery of human affairs. The day approaches on which the mightiest deeds, and deeds of thrilling wonder, shall be wrought—when he shall come, not in the whirlwind, not in the famine, not in the war, in which he came to visit the race which had rejected him and crucified him, but come personally, in the very body in which he once entered this globe, which was torn by the nails and crowned with the thorns. Jesus shall appear as a monarch, and sweeping the scene clear of the rebellious and apostate, set up his dominion over the provinces of a renovated creation. Then shall there go forth a demonstration, against which it will not be possible for infidelity to set itself, that he who died upon Calvary has been living at the right hand of God, superintending the painful march of the faith which he founded, when vengeance is dealt out on the enemies of the cross, and the purifying fire eats away the pollution ingrained into the earth by ages of crime, and the redeemed are sitting with their Lord, looking down from their high citadel, with triumph on the strange work of the destruction of Christ's foes. Then there will be no room to question, that he who died as our Surety has ever lived as our Intercessor; but under the present dispensation, there being no visible exercise of Christ's kingly power, it is not easy to bring forward resistless proofs, if the authority of Scripture be denied, that Jesus is alive. Yet, on the other hand, we are not prepared to admit the total absence of direct, positive, practical witness. If I cannot appeal to such exhibitions of sovereignty as shall hereafter be displayed, when Christ returns to this earth, are there no tokens that the grave could not hold him, and that the heavens have received him? We thus bring you to the statement of our text; for St. Paul is explicit on the fact, that there is such a thing as the manifestation of the life of the Redeemer. It was possible enough that the malice and fury of inveterate persecutors might wear down the body of the apostle; torture might exhaust itself in wasting the limb and tearing the nerve, and famine might draw fire from the eye, and long imprisonment wear away the elasticity of the spirit, and lingering pain almost strip of its covering the framework of sinew and bone; but whilst thus he was always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake—so delivered that he was as one who lived upon the cross—he could feel and he could affirm, that there was such mighty and such continued miracle in his being sustained and kept up to the strife with principalities and powers, that if challenged to prove that his Lord was risen, if challenged to prove that his Lord was alive, he could point to the shattered and almost broken down tabernacle, and answer triumphantly, that the life also of Jesus was made manifest in his mortal flesh.

We thus give you, as we think, the fair scope of the statement of our text. We would associate it with another in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians: "I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death, for we are made a spectacle unto the world, unto angels, and unto men;" a statement every way remarkable. It establishes the opinion that our world is no solitary world, left to its own heritage of woe and of crime, but that there gather around it beings of other orders of intelligence, who gather from the transactions which pass on its surface lessons which sustain them in their own allegiance to God. The Greek is even more emphatic than the English. It is not "we are made a spectacle"—it is rather, "we are made a theatre." So that, in precise accordance with our text, the bodies of the apostles might be considered as a stage, on which the dying of the Lord Jesus was continually exhibited, just in order that angels and men might learn from the drama of trouble and pain that Jesus lived to succour and to strengthen his followers. Thus it is to be the theatre. The actors, if we may so speak, were on the one side fierce and inveterate persecutions; on the other, obedient and abiding consolations; and the scenic representation, which fixed the regards of angels, and ought to have engaged those of men, was the death of Jesus, shown in the sufferings, and the life of Jesus manifested in the upholding of believers. And the great subject that we have now in hand is that manifestation of the life of Christ, the existence of which is here affirmed by St. Paul. We are in quest of evidence, direct, palpable, and more than written evidence, that Jesus is alive; and without wandering, as we might be tempted to wander, into regions of fanciful speculation, in order to find instances of operations which, conducted by the immediate agency of Christ, would of course go to demonstrate the life of Christ, we shall do well to confine ourselves to that single manifestation which, having the authority of an apostle for its reality, cannot be evaded, as in any sense imaginary. It is a fair conclusion from St. Paul's assertion in the text, that though Christ has entered within the veil, and thus wholly abstracted himself from the eye of sense, there are tokens put forth by the sufferings which believers undergo for his sake that Jesus the Redeemer is alive; and it is the accuracy of this conclusion which has yet to be examined. So that the remainder of our discourse will be given to the tracing out the proof of Christ's life which is said to be exhibited in the afflictions of Christ's followers.

And we begin with observing, that the doctrine of Christ living for us is every whit as closely bound up with our salvaion as that of Christ's having died for us. It is no nice speculation, which may be received or set aside, and the scheme of Christianity remain neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. The resurrection was God's attestation to the worth of the atonement; so that had the body of Christ continued under the dominion of death, the inference must have been that the sin of the world was yet untaken away. And it must be remembered that the preaching of the apostles of Christ bore upon the resurrection of their Master, as the great truth which they were commissioned to proclaim. It may be said to have been the prime business of those on whom descended the gifts of the Spirit, to establish the fact that Jesus was alive. If still dead, he was an impostor; if alive, he was the Messiah. And we have to show you, that the persecutions which they underwent, as well as the proclamations which they uttered, went to the proving that Jesus was alive. We think by simple and staightforward reasoning to bring this matter within every man's comprehension. For you will observe, that as it was everything to the apostles to prove the fact of Christ's life, so was it everything to the chief priests and rulers to disprove the fact of Christ's life. They had bribed the Roman soldiers to declare that the disciples came by night and stole away the body of their Master; and you may all perceive, that if they could have made good this declaration, if they could have shown to the satisfaction of the dwellers in Jerusalem that this was the true account of the sepulchre being empty, nothing more could have been needed to the destroying our Lord's claim to the being the Christ. The process is most obvious. Show us that Jesus is not risen, show us that his followers stole and secreted his body, and we shall at once leave to infamy and to scorn the deceivers who are striving to seduce away the people; and we suppose it self-evident, that if the rulers had had proof at their disposal, they would have eagerly brought it forward; they would never have employed power and persecution to keep down the rising religion, if they could have produced undeniable evidence of the falsehood of the statements which its preachers advanced. If the apostles were publishing a lie, and if the rulers were prepared to prove it a lie, let them bring forward their proof, and the apostles must be crushed by the weight of universal contempt. But when, in place of attempting to substantiate their own statement as to the desertion of the sepulchre, they strove only by violence and cruelty to silence the propagators of an opposite system, was it not naturally to be inferred, that they knew the falsehood of their own account, though unwilling to confess the truth of the apostle's account? The rulers said the body was stolen—the apostles said the body was quickened; in place of proving what they affirmed, which would have settled the question, the rulers only tried by stripes and imprisonment to prevail on the apostles to keep back their account from the world. Who, then, does not see, that in persecuting the apostles, in place of proving them liars, the rulers themselves bore witness to the fact that Jesus was alive? They had no evidence to produce of the truth of their own statement, and therefore they set themselves to get rid by force of the opposite statement. Power was substituted for proof, cruelty for argument. And therefore do we contend, that no stronger attestation could have been given to the fact of Christ's life, than the persecution to which the apostles were exposed for asserting that fact. Had it been possible to disprove the fact, recourse would not have been had to the backing by cruelty the sheer denial of the fact; and if there be one characteristic which more than another might have proved to intelligent men that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, we hold it to have been that of the first preachers of the resurrection exposed to every species of assault from the chief priests and scribes, attempted to be forced into silence simply because they could not be convicted of falsehood. So that whilst all the array of persecution was marshalled against the apostles, and the strong arm of civil might and the popular fury that was employed to withhold them from proclaiming Christ's life, the very sufferings which they endured proved the truth of what they preached. And thus it came to pass, in the strongest and most literal sense, that through being always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, the life also of Jesus was manifested in their mortal flesh.

We go on to observe, that since the first preachers of Christianity cheerfully underwent sufferings in support of what they preached, and since the resurrection of Christ was the substance of what they preached, it is quite clear that they themselves believed that Jesus was alive. They might be deceived—that is another question; but it is not supposable that they intended to deceive others. Enthusiasts may suffer the loss of all things in defence of a tenet, but not, we believe, impostors. You must believe a thing to be true, before you can be ready to maintain it with your heart's blood. So that while by submitting to persecution the apostles showed their own belief, bearing about in their bodies his dying was the most decisive testimony that could be given, that they themselves were convinced of his living; and if they themselves were convinced of Christ's life, beyond all question they could not have stolen his body. There is a limit which even enthusiasm cannot pass. If an enthusiast had stolen and secreted the body of Jesus, he would not on that account persuade himself that Jesus was alive; and thus an evidence the most satisfactory is furnished to us, that the Jewish account of the disappearance of Christ's body was false. You see the apostles enduring cheerfully the sternest persecutions, rather than give up the advocacy of the fact that Jesus was risen. You learn from this, that the apostles themselves believed the resurrection of their Lord, which is the same thing as learning that they had nothing to do with the inventing the story of his resurrection. And if the apostles did not invent it, no one could have invented it; and if it was not an invented story, it follows necessarily that it was a true story. And thus, by a series of most simple deductions, you may be said to prove Christ's life, from the apostles being always delivered to death for Christ's sake. Had they not believed him alive, they would not have submitted joyfully to persecution; but their believing that he was alive is itself a mighty proof that he actually was alive. It shows the falsehood of the only other account which was put forth of the disappearance of Christ's body, and therefore establishes the truth of the one which they themselves had advanced. And thus we maintain that Christ's life was manifested in their mortal flesh. There came not down a blow upon that flesh, and there was not made a gash in that flesh, which did not strengthen the evidence of their own belief in the life of their Master: and what proved their own belief proved also the reality of that which they believed; and if, then, I had lived in the earliest days of Christianity, and if I had desired practical evidence that Jesus was alive, then, though the heavens might not have opened themselves to me, displaying the magnificent spectacle on which Stephen was privileged to gaze—the spectacle of the glory of the Eternal One, and of Jesus standing at the right hand of God—yet if I had looked upon the apostles, fighting their way through a sea of tribulation—if I had marked them undaunted by the onset of all before which nature is most accustomed to quail, clinging to the truth of Christ's life, when the might of a banded world rose up to wring from them a denial—why, I think that I must have been possessed of a heart proof against the most rigorous of practical demonstrations, if I had not acknowledged, that forasmuch as these men were "alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, the life also of Jesus was manifested in their mortal flesh."

Now, we have scarcely yet come to the pith of the evidence, and therefore have not yet shown you the full truth of the text. The grand manifestation of the life of Jesus was in the supports and the consolations which were vouchsafed to the persecuted. You will not require proof, that whilst they were alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, the apostles and other preachers of the resurrection were wondrously strengthened and upheld; the shield of Divine protection was spread almost visibly around them, and it seemed almost inevitable that their opponents must prevail, and sweep them from the earth. There came direct and palpable interpositions, which proved that the Lord God was on their side. And when the malice of the ungodly was allowed to do its worst, and the disciples were given up to death under its most terrible shapes, there was yet so much of supernatural assistance afforded, that all but the reprobate must have seen that the power of the Almighty was sustaining the martyrs. They went out of the world,—whether it was the sword, or the cross, or the stake which dismissed them to glory—they went out of the world with gladness in their eye, and with triumph on their lip, confident that their Master lived to welcome them, and therefore able to cry out with Stephen, the leader of the noble army, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And admitting, as you must admit, unless you reject all history, sacred and profane, that the apostles were singularly sustained by God, throughout their arduous and painful career, we shall have no difficulty in making out our proof, that the life of Jesus was manifested in their bodies. For we ask you to bear in mind what we have shown upon scriptural evidence, that the great truth which they published, and in support of which they suffered, was that Jesus was alive. Hence it was to sustain them in proclaiming the life of Jesus that the Almighty interfered, and dealt out peace and consolation. But if the tenet which they were advancing had not been true, would the Almighty have thus upheld them and succoured them? Suppose they had been deceiving themselves, suppose that Jesus had not been alive, that the grave had still held him, and that corruption had seized him, would God have stretched forth the right hand of his power to defend those who were propagating falsehood? Whenever God directly and distinctly interferes to preserve an individual, whilst publishing a doctrine, God virtually gives testimony to the truth of that doctrine. If the doctrine which is published were the reverse of true, He who is truth itself and the fountain of truth would never mark the publisher with a sign of His approval. And thus you have a decisive and a vivid manifestation of the life of Christ, in and through the sufferings of the apostles. They were sufferings for the patient endurance of which God manifestly gave the nerve and the sinew; but, at the same time, they were sufferings undergone for the maintenance of the fact, that Jesus was alive. Hence it follows, that God afforded assistance towards the advocacy of the doctrine of the life of the Mediator. What then? The doctrine must be a true doctrine, because it has God for its supporter. Jesus must have risen, Jesus must be alive; otherwise the Omnipotent would never have put forth his Omnipotence in the succour of those who went to and fro proclaiming that he was risen, proclaiming that he was alive. And thus our text developes its meaning with singular precision. The apostles bore in their bodies Christ's dying: they were "alway delivered to death for Jesus'sake," because they were earnest in affirming that Jesus was alive. The Almighty comforted them, whilst thus delivered to death; and the comfort divinely afforded was the testimony of the Almighty to the life of the Mediator. So, then, the life of Christ was manifested in the bodies of the apostles; and it was enough to look on one of these holy men, to see him serene when the storms were the fiercest, and confident when the springs of human hope were at the lowest—it was enough to behold him upheld in trouble, when you know that mortal energy unaided and alone must have given way and sunk; and you would have felt, you could not have done otherwise than feel, that the Father was marvellously showing in their experience the living of the Son; so that whilst they were "alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, the life also of Jesus was manifested in their mortal flesh."

Now, we may just add to this, that whilst Christ sojourned upon earth, he told his disciples that trouble and persecution would be their lot, when he himself should be withdrawn from their company; but, at the same time, he had also assured them, that he should be alive to act as their Protector, and that being with the Father in glory he would send down the Comforter to guide and uphold them. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake," was one prophecy; "Because I live ye shall live also," was another. We thus show you our text, in both its clauses, delivered by the Redeemer himself years before St. Paul wrote. When, therefore, all occurred exactly as Christ predicted—when the supports were administered which he had pointed out as the results of his life, what can be fairer than the maintaining, that the supports were the proof of his life? If a prophet prophecy that a certain cause shall exist, and a certain effect be produced, when we see the production of the effect we can scarcely refuse assent to the existence of the cause. Such is in every respect the case before us. Christ prophecies that consolation shall be given, and that his own life shall be the well-spring of those consolations. When, therefore, the consolations come, we are bound to feel certified of the life. And thus, looking upon the apostles afflicted just as Christ had predicted, and comforted just as Christ had promised, the affliction resulting from faithfulness to his cause, the comfort resulting from his living to intercede, we can only describe them as manifesting in their bodies the life of the Lord, just as they bore about in their bodies the dying of the Lord.

But we may hope that the meaning of the text, as first delivered by St. Paul, has been sufficiently exhibited and vindicated. And yet we would not have you think, that the manifestation of the life of the Redeemer was confined to the bodies, the mortal flesh, of those who in the earlier days of Christianity fought with idolatry and error. We would rather maintain, that the bearing about in the body Christ's dying is a thing of every generation, and that so also is the manifesting in the body Christ's living. We may be indeed, and we are, through the exuberance of God's mercy, exempted from those very trials through which martyrs and confessors carved their way to their thrones. We bear not about Christ's death in the scathed and shattered appearance of our earthly tabernacles, in the wounds and in the brands with which an infidel world hath graven our bodies; nevertheless, as Christ died for sin, so are we required to die to sin; and wherever the flesh is "crucified with its affections and lusts," and the body offered up on the altar of holy obedience a living sacrifice unto God, then most emphatically is it true, that Christ's death is borne about in our bodies, and we are delivered unto death for Jesus' sake. "Know ye not," saith St. Paul, "know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" And again he saith, "Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed"—expressions which decisively imply, that the dying with, and for Christ, is not confined to seasons when the fires are blazing, and the swords glittering, and bloody hostility hems around the followers of the Lamb; but that it exists as actually and as intensely in days when there may be so much of toleration or indifference that no man concerns himself with the creed of another. And if the dying of the Lord Jesus be thus at all times exhibited in the bodies of believers, is not his life full as vividly manifested? St. Paul joins the two in words which every Christian feels applicable to himself: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Is it necessary that we prove to you with greater precision, that the life of Jesus is now manifested in the mortal flesh of his followers? Let us approach, then. The theatre stands open before us, and the mysterious and mighty drama is fixing the regards of the angelic creation. Let us take any one of those who in deed, and not merely in word, are walking by faith, and not by sight. I care not if he be selected out of the lowest rank of society; let him be truly a man of faith, and his meanness and insignificance will but heighten the beauty and the brilliancy of the manifestation. He will tell you that his whole conduct is ordered on the supposition, that he has a Saviour, who ever lives to intercede on his behalf. He will tell you, further, that never in one lonely particular has he found the supposition falsified by experience. He goes to Christ sorrowful, believing that he lives; he comes away comforted, and thus proves that he lives. He carries his burdens to Christ, supposing him to be alive; he finds them taken away, and thus he demonstrates him to be alive. All that is promised as the result of Christ's life comes into his possession, and is therefore an evidence of Christ's life. If not, then it is no proof of life to do the actions of life; it is no proof that a being has actual existence, that he discharges every function which is proper to existence; it is no proof of not dwelling in the grave, to be rejoiced by the sunshine, fanned by the breeze, and moving to and fro upon the earth. If I am a believer, I look to Christ as living for me, I go to Christ as living for me, I pray to Christ as living for me; and if—and we challenge denial to what we now assert—philosophy may call it mysticism, and the world denounce it as enthusiasm, but heaven which is above us rings with the truth, and the hearts of thousands and of tens of thousands echo back the appeal. If I am never disappointed in my references to Christ as living for me—if when I look to him as living for me the bright glance of light flashes into the soul—if when I go to him as living for me the warm grasp of life is round about the heart—if when I pray to him as living for me the rich speech of life comes floating back in answer,—if I so prove that Jesus lives, is there not strong and deep and eloquent testimony in my own experience that Jesus lives? What though there be the bearing in the body the dying of the Lord, in the mortification of the flesh, in the wrestling with affections, in the crucifying of lust? All this is only preparatory to the manifestation in the body of the life of the Lord. I cannot conquer in my own strength—I lean upon Christ's strength; it fails me not; and thus is it manifested that Jesus is alive. I need cordials for the combat: I turn to Christ as the good Samaritan, I receive the oil and the balm and the wine; and thus is it manifested that Christ is alive. I am met by principalities and powers; they press upon me, they almost trample me under foot: I appeal to Christ as an intercessor; assistance is sent down; and thus it is manifested that Christ is alive. In short, if a Christian lives only by faith in a living Saviour, then his life must be a manifestation of the life of the Saviour. If Christ be not risen, if Christ be not alive, how comes it that they who act upon the supposition that he is risen and that he is alive, find the supposition perpetually verified, and in no instance falsified—verified by the assistance vouchsafed, verified by the promises fulfilled, verified by the consolations enjoyed in these mortal bodies, which are the theatres of truceless warfare with a corrupt nature and with apostate spirits?

We will not dwell on what is too plain to need proof. The Christian must keep under his body; he must mortify his body, he must crucify his body; and thus is he alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake. But then all that Christ declares he would ever be alive to communicate, in comfort, in succour, in victory, is received in his body; and thus is Christ's life manifested in his mortal flesh. We preach to you now the gospel. We tell those amongst you whose bodies have long ago been given up to the workings of sin and of death, to the manifestation of the power of natural corruption—we tell them that he who is verily "the Resurrection and the Life" stands ready to turn their bodies into temples, lit up with the shinings of his own glorious and indestructible being. We tell you all, that so ample is God's love, so unlimited are the benefits of Christ's passion, that there is not one of you into whom the Mediator is not waiting to enter, ready to carry on afresh the conflict which he waged upon earth, and to prove himself alive by throwing such strength into the withered arm, that it shall scatter the hosts which would keep back the soul from the inheritance of the saints. Oh! when we come to die, what a privilege to have the life of Christ manifested in this life, in our mortal flesh! What a fearful, dark desolate thing, to have nothing manifested but death—death in its naked, native ghastliness! We shall feel our own need of Christ then, however bravely we may carry it, whilst the pulse beats well, and the spirits are not broken. Be, then, persuaded, all of you, that ye strive by prayer now—now, ere the silver cord is being loosed, or the golden bowl is being broken, that ye may be made conformable to Christ in his death—"planted together in the likeness of his death"—and then, when the last hour comes, as it must come to you all, and you stand on the border line of eternity, the soul shall spring upward, elastic with life, and you shall find—oh! most glorious, most blessed discovery!—you shall find that he who has lived to sustain it in its pilgrimage, lives also to gladden it in its immortality.

CHRIST THE LIFE AND THE LIGHT OF MEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 3, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."—John i. 4, 5.

IN the latter of these verses, you observe a confusion of cases. The present tense is used in regard to the shining of the light; the past in regard to the light not being comprehended by the darkness: "the light shineth;" "the darkness comprehended it not." Probably the Evangelist wished the statements to be applied to different ages, and therefore used a form of expression which has the appearance of inaccuracy. He desires you to understand that the light had shone, was shining, and would continue to shine in darkness, but in each case not comprehended by the darkness; and you may all perceive that by suddenly changing the tenses, he conveys the idea that the shining of the light in darkness, and its non-comprehension by the darkness, are not confined to any one period, but may both be affirmed as continually and everywhere occurring. We make this reference to the confusion of tenses, and the reason which probably caused it, in order that in endeavouring to lead you over very large districts of time, and to apply our text to successive periods, we may not be thought to make an unwarranted use of the passage.

But now turn to the assertions of the text. You are aware that it is our Lord Jesus Christ of whom the Evangelist here speaks. Christ it is, in "whom was life; and the life was the light of men." St. John dwells on Christ under the emphatic title of the Word, declaring in the strongest terms his actual Divinity—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He ascribes to this eternal Word the whole work of creation—"All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." Then he would fix our thoughts on that peculiar relationship in which the Word stands to ourselves; he would draw off attention from other worlds and other tribes, which equally with our own, had the Word as a Creator, and fasten it upon the benefits received perhaps by none but ourselves from this Divine Person in whom "was life; and the life was the light of men." We frankly own that in these, and the following words, there is a depth and an extent of assertion hardly to be equalled in any portion of Scripture. We do not expect to fathom the depth, or to compass the extent, but we trust, by the blessing of God, to bring out from the passage much of important and interesting truth; though there will still remain much for further study and further prayer. It will not be necessary to make any other division of our discourse than that which is offered by the verses themselves. Under our first division we would examine the assertion, that in Christ "was life; and the life was the light of men." Under our second, it will be our business to endeavour to show you how this "light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

I. Now you all know what we mean when we describe God as self-existent. Every being, except the Divine Being, has had a beginning; there was a time when it was not, and a time when its existence commenced. Of course, a being whose existence has commenced must have been produced by some cause, in other words, must have been created—wrought, that is, and animated by some mighty and pre-existent agent. All life to which we can assign a commencement is necessarily a derived life. It cannot be inherent in the being who possesses it, for if it were, it must have always been, and this is denying that there was ever a beginning to the life; so that the only Being whose life is not a derived life is the Divine Being; seeing that of him alone we can affirm that he is from everlasting to everlasting, that he never knew beginning, as he never can know end. It is God then, and none but God, who is self-existent, who, that is, has life in himself, drawing it from no extraneous sources, but having been from all eternity his own mighty fountain of being. And, therefore, in asserting that in him was life, the Evangelist does but add to the proofs of the Divinity of Christ, affirming him to be self-existent, a property which we have said belongs exclusively to God. You will remember that it was declared by the Redeemer—"As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." A declaration which proves that the Son as well as the Father is Jehovah, the Being that is, who has always subsisted, and in whom vitality is as much underived as indestructible, and it is this having life in himself which seems ascribed in our text to the Word, so that the life of which the Evangelist speaks as being in Christ, is none other than that essential immortality which belongs to our Maker to which no origin can be assigned, but which is itself the origin of all that animation which is diffused throughout the universe. If St. John had gone on simply to declare that the life which was in the Word was the *life* of men; we should have assented at once to his proposition; we should have considered it as tantamount to what St. Paul declares of God, that "in him we live, and move, and have our being." It is our assured belief that every tribe of animated existence draws its life from God, according to the assertion of the Book of Job in respect to the Almighty—"In whose hand is the soul (or more strictly the breath) of every living thing." But, you observe, the Evangelist does not declare that the life of the Word was the life of men. This would only have been placing men on the same level with the beasts of the field, or the fowls of the air—seeing that these as well as ourselves derive their animation exclusively from God. The declaration is that the life of the Word, the life of Christ, was the *light* of men; and we consider these words as marking such a derivation to ourselves of that life, that immortality which was in the Word, as can never be affirmed of the inferior tribes of this creation. Undoubtedly, as we have already said, these tribes draw their life from the Word, at whose command it was that earth, and sea, and air teemed with animated being. But there is all the difference between deriving life from the Word, and having that very life which is in the Word as an enlivening, illuminating principle within ourselves. It is this which seems asserted of men, and we hail the assertion as a fine testimony to the nature of the human soul: "The life was the light of men"—the light of men, that which enables them to walk in a wholly different region from the beasts that perish; which irradiates, as it were, the universe, so that they can penetrate its wonders and scan its boundaries, whilst all other creatures of the earth are limited to a single and insignificant province. This light is the soul with its varied powers and its mighty endowments; it is the possessing in addition to a principle of animal life which they shared in common with the brutes—it is the possessing in addition to this an immortal principle communicated to no creatures but themselves, which qualifies men for those deep investigations and lofty journeyings in which they are followed by none of those tribes over whom they have dominion. Yea, the soul with those faculties and agencies which we designate as reason, and judgment, and conscience, is emphatically the light of human kind, for if this soul be in any case—not extinguished, that we know impossible—but eclipsed, so that the individual is brought into a state of absolute darkness, we only regard him as one morally and spiritually blind. We again say, that it is a fine testimony to the nature of this light, to the nature, that is, of the human soul, when we find it described as the life that was from all eternity in the Word. Who shall marvel that man is declared to have been originally formed in the image of God, when it appears that even now he bears within himself a principle which may be characterized as the life of his Creator? It gives a majesty to reason and to the whole furniture of intellectual endowment, such as is never reached by our most high wrought panegyric and a dignity to conscience which would make us fear to disregard its slightest admonitions. Thus you find the light within us described as the everlasting Word. I can tell the man who is prostituting reason or doing violence to conscience, that what he debases is no earth-born thing, and what he withstands, no perishable opponent. I can summon him to a right use of his powers, and a submission to the internal monitor by the assurance that the very Deity stirs within him, and when I preach to him of Christ, and strive to win him over to faith in the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and he would turn proudly away as though I had pointed him to an object unworthy of his contemplation, oh! then it is a fine vantage-ground presented by the text on which to take my stand and assault his infidelity. It is because he feels himself gifted with a mighty intelligence, able to cope with much that is intricate and sublime, and therefore fancies his own powers commensurate with his necessities—it is because of all this that he gives nothing but his contempt to the statement which I bring to him of a Redeemer's interference. But I do not set myself at once to decry his powers and thus strengthen his pride against every argument. I frankly admit the greatness of reason; I only desire to know what reason is. I confess that there is a brilliancy in the light by which he is guided; I only wish to ascertain whence that light emanates; and if he will receive as authentic the account which Scripture gives of his origin, I at once convict him of arraying, as it were, God against God; of setting up as antagonist to the everlasting Word that which, after all, is only the life of this Word. We sometimes find the proud notion entertained of doing without a Redeemer; of guiding one's-self by one's own powers, by means of what is called natural religion, in the path to everlasting happiness; but allowing that the notion were not the vainest, as well as the most presumptuous, we wish to know whether even this would be doing without Christ? Had Adam never fallen, had he passed safely through that gentle probation, which, though gentle, overmatched his strength, would he have done without the Word when thus living in an eternity of blessedness? What then the light by which he had guided himself in the midst of temptation; what the reason, what the judgment, what the sensitiveness to wrong, what the preference of right which had combined to the throwing around his path a sufficiency of lustre, and thus prevented his wandering from steadfast obedience? We can imagine our forefather confirmed in his innocence, and entering after a while on a fixed state of happiness, where he would have been for ever secured against apostacy, but not independent on the Word which was with God, and the Word which was God. It would not indeed be, that because redeemed by the Word, he thus obtained immortality; but it would have been, because created by the Word. Redemption would have been unnecessary, because there would have been no rebellion; but it would have been wholly in virtue of what had been communicated in creation that he had been confirmed in his allegiance and had overthrown the tempter; and, therefore, when fixed in glory, looking back on the course he had trodden, the language of thanksgiving, and not that of self-gratulation, would have been as suited to Adam as to any one of ourselves; and this common parent of mankind, for whose admission into blessedness it had not been needful that the Word should be made flesh, must have bowed before the Word with the grateful confession, that by this Word he had been guided, and strengthened, and upheld; and he must have pointed to this Word when asked by angels how he escaped the machinations of Satan; and he must have given as the only account of his safety and success, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."

We thus argue that had man never fallen he would still have owed his immortality to the Word. The Word endowed human nature with its own life, hanging up in its chambers a lamp and continually feeding the flame with the flashings of its own eternity; and shall I substitute this lamp, now that it has been fractured, now that the light is dimmed and almost extinguished, shall I substitute this lamp for the Word itself? Or shall I boast myself free from all need of the Word or from what belongs to the Word, just because there glows within me a principle which I have derived from that Word, and which in its energy and deathlessness proclaims itself the offspring of that Word? Oh, it is the strangest of all spectacles, that of a man taking reason and rejecting Christ as his guide, fancying that in directing himself by the shining of his own spirit he shows an independence of any such benefactor as is revealed to us in the gospel: he shows his ignorance of creation in putting scorn upon redemption; he knows not who equipped him with the powers of which he is so confident; he knows neither what nor whence those powers are; he draws from the Word those very energies by which he would prove himself independent of the Word. The soul was Christ's communication of himself to the unfallen man just as in redemption he communicates himself to fallen. The intellectual capacities were his shinings into the uncorrupted, even as are pardon, and renewal, and acceptance into the depraved and ruined; and now, if I walk the fields of science and expatiate over the wonders of the universe, and nature gives up one secret after another to human penetration, and if I then turn to the sublimer mysteries of grace, and study the amazing record of the winning back of this earth from the bondage of corruption, they are not different beings to whom the different investigations prove me a debtor: whilst led by reason across the spreadings of space, and enabled by the powers of intellect to take the span and the altitude of the broad and elevated architecture of God, I owe all to the everlasting Word just as truly as when I feel myself strengthened to cast off the sin which most easily besets me, and see the lost immortality brought within reach of the rebel and the exile. As a rational being, I owe everything to the Word; as a redeemed being I owe everything to the Word: his the intelligence by which I may count the stars, as well as his the atonement through which I may be furnished for life; his the memory in which I can treasure truth, as well as his the righteousness in which I may come before God; his the judgment by which I can weigh and compare conflicting propositions, as well as his the intercession by which I may be sheltered from the wrath I have provoked; his the imagination by which I can soar from earth and wander through immensity, as well as his the purchase of the inheritance far outshining all that I can conceive. Oh, then, if because of redemption I adore and magnify the Word made flesh, shall I not, because endowed with reason adore and magnify the Word as the uncorrupt self-existent? If as a redeemed creature I give thanks to the Word that he "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," shall I not as a rational creature pour forth this grateful tribute to the Word, "in him was life, and the life was the light of men?"

We might enlarge further upon this if our space would admit; we might lead you to remember that with the fall of our first father, Adam, came the forfeiture of every blessing which had been originally conferred upon our race, and we must believe, that had not the Redeemer interposed at the moment of apostacy there would not have been a hair's-breadth between rebellion and ruin. We can give no account why the penalty which had been pronounced against eating the forbidden fruit was not instantly and to the very letter executed, save that the virtues of that interposition which the Word had covenanted to make in the fulness of time were already energetic and making themselves felt in the respite of the guilty. We know that there must have been some mighty interference ere arrest could have been put on the provoked curse of God, and this interference must have been that of the Mediator Christ; the energies of that sacrifice which the Word had covenanted to offer upon Calvary must have prevailed so soon as sin was wrought to stay the plague which sin had let loose. And what was there in the Word which specially enabled him thus to irradiate the lost world and disperse the gathering gloom? We answer, the life that was in the Word. What gave virtue to his sacrifice, but that it was the self-existent who died? The life, the self-existence gave infinite worth to the offering, and that which gave this worth was emphatically our light. The heaven is still hung with its glorious lamps, and reason still burns brightly, and intellect is not quenched, and immortality wears a brilliant colouring, all because the Word, which never had beginning, consented to be born; the Word, which never can end, consented to die.

II. We have not space to examine further the first verse of the text; let us now proceed to the second, wherein the Evangelist makes general assertions in reference to the shining of that light of which he had spoken amid the gloom which it failed to disperse. "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." Again, we ask you to observe the change of tenses. It seems to prove of the description that it belongs to all ages, and we shall therefore apply it to widely different periods and circumstances.

Now, that God had never left himself wholly without witnesses is a truth whose maintenance is of the first importance if we would vindicate the moral government beneath which we live; and we are more used, it may be, to observe the apparent destitution in which men have been left than the means of instruction afforded them when they seem almost forsaken. It is a great fact, and this it is which the evangelist may be considered as confirming, that there has always been light, however it may have been in darkness that this light has shone. Our foregoing argument has gone to prove that whatsoever there has been of light amongst men, natural, moral, intellectual, spiritual, must be traced exclusively to the everlasting Word and to that life, that self-existence which is peculiar to this Word. There will be no necessity for our reconstructing this argument. We may go on to speak of light as afforded to one age after another, without pausing at each step to prove it an emanation from the life of the Word. We say then, first, that the light hath shone in the consciences of men, but this has been at the best a shining in darkness. It is said in the book of Proverbs, "The spirit of man is the candle," or lamp, "of the Lord," and never can it be affirmed that God hath left his creatures void of instruction whilst we know that this candle hath burned in every age and in every individual. A man has never been born without a conscience, however in young days he may have dimmed or almost put out the lamp, so that in the ripeness of his strength he has seemed wholly destitute of the illuminating principle; never amid the dreariness of heathenism has the individual entered on this scene of probation without having in his breast an emphatic monitor whose voice has made itself heard amid the din and turbulence of passion, speaking reproachfully when vice has triumphed, and approvingly when virtue. Take away the revelation contained in the Bible, and you leave to every man a revelation of conscience, and this revelation—it is that of our living nature—the eye of a moral governor, who takes strict cognizance of actions, and will hereafter mete out to them a most rigid retribution. The light shineth for every one of us: stripped of all theology, but the theology of conscience it is capable of deciding between right and wrong; of ascertaining that to follow the right is to please an unseen being at whose disposal we lie; and to follow the wrong is to provoke his wrath and ensure our destruction; and we are not abandoned to utter darkness whilst such a theology as this burns and flashes in the chambers of our spirit. "The light shineth," for the emanations of the everlasting Word penetrate the human soul, whatever the country, whatever the age.

But if it be true that "the light shineth," it is equally true that it shineth in darkness. Man, in whom the lamp is lit up, is a fallen and depraved thing, alienated from God, and with all his moral faculties weakened and perverted. Conscience leads him to resist evil passions, but inclination is so powerful on the side of passions, that he finds it easier to resist the monitor than the tyrants against whom he is admonished. Conscience warns him of the terrors of the future, but he is violently tempted by the gratification of the present, and what is distant has little weight when set against what is near. Conscience tells him of the allegiance which he owes to an invisible Creator, but there are other masters bribing him with glittering inducements, and what marvel, if with a nature such as his, the objects of sight preponderate over the objects of faith? Conscience, then, is a light, the light of the eternal Word, but a light shining in a dark place, where the shadows thicken so fast and the gloom is so dense that the rays fail to produce any moral illumination. And what are we to say of the great body of men, practically ignorant as they remain of the very elements of truth, notwithstanding the revelation made by the Word through the instrumentality of their conscience, but that "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not?" But besides, how much of light streams in upon man from every part of that universe which rose at the bidding of the Word. Who can deny that the works of the visible creation burn with Deity? Who will say that God has left his creatures ignorant of himself, his existence, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, when he has placed them in such a temple and surrounded them with unnumbered impresses of skill and benevolence? Who can look on the majestic outspread scenery—who can contemplate the firmament with its rich inlay of stars—who can gaze on the ocean as it sleeps in the calm or heaves in the tempest—who can observe how provision is made for the wants of every living thing, so that the eyes of all wait upon an invisible guardian, and he satisfieth their desires—who can do this, and refuse to confess that nature is eloquent of God? Who can do this, and yet declare of the creation that it does not glow with radiations of its Maker? St. Paul expressly asserts, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." There is, then, light; the Eternal Word is shining upon men from the constellations of the sky, from the sparkling of the waters, from the verdure of the fields, from the rejoicing of every animated tribe. But into what place has this light to enter ere it can produce on the earth a moral illumination? Into that darkest of all spots, the human heart where it is opposed by the mist of passion, the clouds of ignorance, and that night on which it is hardest to throw the dawn of morning, the night of an unwillingness to know anything of God, and a desire to banish him from his own world? And what account, then, have we to give of the theology of creation, but that which we have just given of the theology of conscience? There is a light, but the light shineth in a dark place. Men in every age might have been guided to a knowledge of their Maker from a survey of his workmanship, might have learned from the manifestations around them so much of the character of God, as would have preserved them from idolatry. These have fallen into the most degraded superstitions, these have abandoned themselves to every kind of unrighteousness, not because left without a revelation—the universe is witness against this—but simply because "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

It is not, however, to be supposed that what we have termed the theology of conscience and the theology of creation furnish the whole of that light which has been vouchsafed where the gospel has not shone. You are to remember that the patriarchal religion was undoubtedly derived from immediate revelation, and that it was built upon truths which man was most interested in knowing. The acquaintance of the early fathers of our race with the one true God, the prophecy which had declared that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, the Divine institutions of the Sabbath and of sacrifice—these all concurred, to the producing while the world was yet young, a religious system just fitted to be preliminary to the gospel dispensation. The eternal Word shone upon man, so soon as he had transgressed, in promises of deliverance, in directions how the fallen were to worship their Maker; but when men multiplied and were scattered over the earth they quickly forgot most of this ancestral religion; and yet in all their dispersions they retained something of the system of their forefathers; disguised indeed and debased, but still to be recognized by every attentive examiner. The only satisfactory mode of accounting for many of the rites and observances of heathenism is to refer them to tradition. Whence the universal prevalence of sacrifice as a means of propitiating God if not from the tradition that the Divine Being was to be appeased by shedding of blood? Whence that division of time into periods of seven days so general amongst the nations of the East, if not from the tradition of the institution of the Sabbath? Where that otherwise unaccountable, almost universal worship of the serpent, if not from the tradition of what had happened in Paradise? In every age and in every district of heathenism has the light thus shone, so that men in the midst of their idolatries, rearing altars to demons, offering animal, yea, often human sacrifices, are witness that a revelation has at some time been vouchsafed. "The light shineth" in the memory of the fall and of the promise of deliverance said to be preserved in the legends and institutions of Paganism. But need we add that "the light shineth in darkness?" Tradition has everywhere been rapidly and thoroughly obscured, so that whilst we who know the truth from revelation can trace it in the superstitions of idolatry, the slaves of those superstitions are as utterly ignorant of it as though it had never been handed down to their fathers. When we see the heathen bowing down before idols, and thus witnessing that there is a Supreme Being to be worshipped; slaying their victims, and thus declaring that without shedding of blood there is no remission; oh! we cannot say that the light is not shining; we can only say, that "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

The theology of conscience, the theology of creation, and the theology of tradition; all have failed to disperse the moral gloom. Then another radiation from the eternal Word shall be granted, and the Jews shall be shone upon through the types and figures of the law. Certainly, the dispensation beneath which the chosen people lived, compared with that under which other nations were left, might be characterized as a dispensation of light. The various legal institutions, the sacrifices, the solemnities, and ceremonies, all sent forth rays converging to the Sun of Righteousness, which in the fulness of time was to cross man's horizon. The gospel dawned under the law, and as the period of manifestation fixed in God's counsels drew near, the twilight imperceptibly deepened, and the streaks of the morning were stronger on the firmament; yet even then it was true that the light shone in darkness. The understandings of the Jews were so cloudy, and their hearts so abandoned, that they substituted the type for what it typified, and in place of being led by revelation to its object, were as ignorant as the heathen of the great propitiation. Was it, then, that sufficient light had not been vouchsafed? Was it that the truths of the gospel were not outlined with sufficient boldness in the rites of the temple worship? Was it that prophecy defined not with sufficient clearness the person and character of the Redeemer? You cannot say this; you cannot thus explain why the Jewish people, living under the immediate government of God, their priests daily ministering at altars whose fires were manifestations of the everlasting Word, and their seers irradiating for them the future, so that they might gaze on a Redeemer travailing in the greatness of his strength, remained for the most part in the gloom of a moral darkness: you can only say in the melancholy but emphatic words of the Evangelist, that "The light shone in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not."

And what, finally, can be declared of those who are privileged with the full shinings of the gospel? Indeed upon ourselves has the day-star risen. "The people which sat in darkness have seen a great light." The theology of conscience, of tradition, of creation, of type, all fade away before the revelation of the Word made in these last days to ourselves. And if we have light it is that Christ liveth in us. We are bidden to re-illumine the almost quenched immortality by receiving into our hearts the resurrection and the life. It may then be unreservedly asserted that the true light now shineth. Oh! how does it shine? Has it dispersed the ignorance of the nations? Is the earth rejoicing in its splendours? Is every heart irradiated and warmed by it? Is every individual, even in the present assembly, guided and cheered by it? Alas! we are still constrained to say, that "the light shineth in darkness;" still forced to admit, that "the darkness comprehended it not." It is in the noon-tide as it was in the twilight; men are insensible to the manifestation of the Word; they walk in the light of their own fire, in the sparks which themselves have kindled. By placing man under a variety of dispensations God would prove that no amount of light will at all suffice to illuminate fallen creatures. Unless the Holy Spirit purge the sight, the Sun may be in the heavens, but we shall not be advantaged by his beams. What then remains that, seeing how possible it is to continue in darkness in the midst of light, but we pray earnestly with the Psalmist, "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." If it be not proved at the judgment, that the gospel has been "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path," there will be no excuse from the deficiency of revelation, for the Word is amongst us, "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel." The only account to be given of our having groped to the last, as the blind in the day, will be that we cried not for God's Holy Spirit, which is bestowed upon all who ask it, to take the scales from our eyes, and the veil from our hearts; and angels mourning over us as for ever, lost! lost!—this will be a melancholy thrilling thing; lost, though born in a Christian land; lost, though baptized with a Christian baptism; lost, though Christ was set before us in all his preciousness and in all his fulness, and we were invited, yea, besought to be reconciled through him unto God—angels will have no cause but this to assign for our ruin, (which ruin God grant may be turned from all of us!) Alas! "The light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

THE HIDINGS OF THE DEITY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 10, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

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AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."—Psalm cxvii. 2.

THERE is a peculiarity in this verse, in that its first clause speaks of God as though he were actually inscrutable, and we could know nothing of him; but the second clause speaks of him, as though certain at least that his properties were ascertainable, or might be observed by such beings as ourselves: "Clouds and darkness are round about him." Then you might say, 'We must remain in ignorance; of what profit is it that we search or inquire after God?' But when the Psalmist proceeds to say, "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," we are tempted to ask, How could he know this, seeing that on his own showing God involves himself in impenetrable night? Perhaps the best way of removing all appearance of contradiction is, to suppose that the second clause is the Psalmist's inference from the first. The fact that "clouds and darkness are round about" God only fortifies David in the persuasion, that God must be "righteous in all his ways." It will be interesting and instructive, to examine the text on this supposition. We shall do so throughout our present discourse. God clothing himself not with light, but with darkness, a reason for our trusting him, for our feeling confidence in his attributes and in his perfections. This is our subject: may He "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts," and enable us to obtain profit from such a subject of meditation!

Now, you must all be aware, that the inspired writers dwell frequently and earnestly on the sublime mode in which God withdraws himself from human gaze. "Touching the Almighty," saith Job, "who can find him out? He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the sky." It is in language such as this that the Bible speaks of the infinite and eternal God. And whenever prophets and apostles desire to give us the sublimest view of the Almighty, they proceed not to laboured and diffuse description, but draw at once an awful veil between us and his majesty. And whenever in olden times it pleased God to give token of his visible presence, he came not down with the gorgeous retinue of celestial pomp, but with the deep solemnities of mystic clouds he bowed the hearts of his chosen people. It was a cloud, which conducted the wanderings of Israel; it was a cloud, which filled the tabernacle of the

Lord. The symbols of God's greatness were the robes of concealment, and he demanded homage, not so much by what he has revealed, as by what the revelation itself pronounced obscure. And it should be observed, that all this proceeded not from unwillingness to declare his brightness, but rather from the fact, that since this brightness was Divine, it could not be endured by human vision. It was an unavoidable consequence on his being God, that by shadowy tokens only could he discover himself to man. To this he himself referred, you remember, when discoursing with Moses as his own friend. Moses had besought the Lord that he would show him his glory, but God said—"Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live;" and although he "made all his goodness to pass before him," as being that which the creatures of earth might behold and yet breathe, when the august train of his glory swept by, he hid his servant in the cleft of the rock, lest he should be withered to nothing by the unearthly blaze.

And if we pass from the days of ancient Israel to our own, we think much and speak much of the mysteries, which undoubtedly exist in the nature of God, and in his operations whether in providence or in grace; but after all, it may be that we scarcely regard those mysteries in their most important point of view,—that we rather consider them as secrets which surpass our ingenuity, than as fields which yield a rich harvest of honour to the Creator and of advantage to ourselves. There is a fear of our not regarding these mysteries as necessary portions of the dealings between finite beings and the infinite; as forced, so to speak, into God's dispensations, by his unmeasured superiority over the work of his own hands. Nay, many go even so far as to denounce and decry revelation altogether, just because it contains truths too large for human comprehension; forgetting or overlooking, that since it is probably essential to the very nature of God, that he should hide himself in clouds, their ground of rejection is virtually a ground of belief and acceptance.

And our text seems to breathe the language of confidence and of praise. It confesses God mysterious; it clothes God in the thick darkness. But at the same time, it seems to gather from the confession only stronger persuasion of his righteousness and his truth. We are to investigate the reasonableness of this. Is there ground, in the fact that "clouds and darkness are round about him," for the exclaiming with increased confidence, "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne?" Yes, it is true, whether the clouds and darkness are round about God in regard of his own nature and properties, or in regard of his dealings with his creatures.

I. As to God in himself—"Clouds and darkness are indeed round about him." We know nothing of God in himself; we know him only in his attributes; and his attributes only as written in his works and in his word. We conceive of goodness and power and justice, and purity and wisdom; we suppose these qualities all infinite, and bound up and centred in one sublime and incommunicable essence; but further than this our conceptions can never extend. We feel that Deity is near us at every instant, that he is around us, that "in him we live and move and have our being," and yet at the same time we know, that the distant corners of the universe are full of his presence, and that there moves not the being in the very outskirts of creation, which is not drawing daily from his fulness. And thus God remains ever the greatest mystery unto man; and when we would launch into the unfathomed deep of his compassions, or travel across the unlimited spreadings of his life-time, or walk the circuit of his dwelling place, we feel ourselves presently overborne by the stupendousness of the enterprise, and forced to confess, that whatever the powers of other orders of intelligence, the highest energies of our own quail before the majesty and magnificence of Jehovah. There is certainly nothing that should surprise us in this; if we would but observe how little way our reason can make, when labouring amongst things with which we are every day conversant, we should be prepared to expect, that when striving to investigate the nature and attributes of Deity, it would be altogether incompetent to comprehend them. Let it only be remembered, that we are a mystery to ourselves, that every object around us baffles our penetration, that there is not an insect, and not a leaf, and not an atom, which does not master us if we attempt to apprehend its nature and its growth,—and we must admit, that there is a presumption which outweighs language, in attempting to ascertain what God is and how he subsists. It is enough, that we observe the most gifted of our fellow men applying themselves assiduously to the commonest facts, the most familiar occurrences, and yet being able to do nothing more than trace certain connections between cause and effect; and we ought to be convinced, that we possess not the intellectual capacity, which can allow of our embracing the wonders of Godhead. So that not only the stars as they march in their brightness, and the winds as they sweep in their rushings, and the waters as they flow in their tides, but every sand-grain, and every bubble, and every beat of the pulse, and every blade of grass, and every flitting insect, should prepare us for the finding that "clouds and darkness are round about" God. Why, even when God makes announcements of his nature, they are such as quite baffle our reason. Turn, for example, to the doctrine of the Trinity. We are not perhaps competent to judge, whether the union of three persons in one essence could have been made intelligible unto man; it may be, that we have not the faculties, by which so wonderful a fact could in any case be grappled with; so that whatever the amount of information, we must still have continued unacquainted with the mode how three can ever be one. At all events, it is certain that God hath concealed this mode from us; "he hides himself" even when he would reveal himself. Clouds are about him, even when he would give light; and what we want you to feel in regard to all this concealment of God, is that it should summon forth our thankfulness. We ask you what limit there would be to human pride, if reason availed to "find out God." If now reason is prone enough to think lightly of God, though compelled by such a doctrine as that of the Trinity, to confess herself unable to cope with his nature; if the case were reversed, if her search were successful, and her power commensurate with her daring; then in all likelihood she would scorn him, whose dwelling lay not beyond the reach of her flight, and deny allegiance to a sovereignty, which she found herself able thoroughly to explore. Indeed there would be apparent fairness in the objection, that revelation which brought down the infinite to the level of the finite, must contain false representations, and deserve therefore to be placed under the outlawry of the world. We should have reason sitting in assize upon the professed revelation; and when she found that there was given no account of God but what was in every respect easy and intelligible, so that he painted himself as a being, removed not either in essence or property from the contemplation of man, why it can scarcely be questioned, that reason would give her verdict, and that justice would applaud her decision, that the alleged communication from heaven wanted the most ordinary signs of so illustrious an origin. And thus, had there been no clouds, no darkness around God, we must believe that the lawlessness of our race would have vastly outstripped its present dimensions; that pride, pampered by the discovery that God was comprehensible, would have dictated the opinion, that there was no vast risk in despising his authority; or that infidelity, obtaining from revelation itself a plausible excuse for its rejection, would have taken all point from the threatenings of Christianity, and turned man loose to play the rebel without anxiety and without misgiving. But do not you see now how the argument turns? If this grievous consequence would have followed on there being no clouds around God—if a God whom we could have comprehended would have been a God whom we could hardly have feared—then is it not the very circumstance of his being veiled in obscurity, which should make us reverence and adore him, ay, and feel persuaded of his possessing all those properties which fit him to be the moral governor of this creation? What then? If I have been brought to the confession, "Clouds and darkness are round about him," must I shut myself up in my ignorance, as though I could make out nothing on points which most concern me as an accountable being? Nay, quite the reverse. The obscurity which there is about God does but strengthen my conviction that he is God, my persuasion that he will show forth all the attributes which pertain to God; so that after confessing, "Clouds are round about him," I shall exclaim with assurance, and even with exultation, "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

It may be doubted whether redemption through the blood of a Mediator is made sufficiently matter of simple faith, and of simple faith only. Men are fond of striving to develop the secret reasons, as well as the obvious results of the stupendous plan, and thus transgress the just bounds of inquiry. We are to rejoice in the countless benefits of the oblation of the Lamb of God, and to study diligently its piercing warnings against sin; but there must always be an awful and overwhelming mystery—a mystery quite unapproachable by man—in the fact that for the sake of an apostate race the Son of God did die upon the cross. And beside this general mysteriousness, there is a great deal hidden in respect of the atonement. We can form no adequate notions of the incarnation. How the Godhead could tabernacle in the flesh; how the Divinity and humanity could coalesce to make a Mediator; how there could be a bearing of sin, and yet a freedom from sinfulness; an impossibility of being overpowered by temptation, and yet such a capacity for being tempted, as should ensure perfect sympathy with ourselves—there are clouds and darkness round all these points, and the more you search, the more you will be persuaded, that it lies out of human power, at least with our present amount of information, to scan the wonders of the Person, and to unravel the intricacies of the work of the Redeemer. But in what tone should we make the confession of clouds and darkness being round about God when regarded as a Saviour? We can assert of all which is thus hidden, that it is alike for God's glory and our benefit that it is hidden. The points to which we have referred, are not points which it concerns man accurately to understand, though it is at his soul's peril not to believe; and there is nothing, by which God is so much honoured, and the soul so much advantaged, as by our taking him at his word. Faith, which is nothing less than the triumph of spirit over flesh, offers the largest tribute to God, and is also our best discipline as probationers for eternity; and if there had been no difficulties in redemption, no mysteries, nothing to contend against, nothing to struggle with—if, in short, there had been no clouds and no darkness round about God, there would have been none of that glory, which now redounds to him from the appointed dispensation, that "we walk by faith, not by sight"—none of that moral advantage which flows to ourselves, from the being called to lean confidently on an invisible staff, and to tread the waters as though hardened into a pavement of brass. Oh! if it be the fact that "Clouds and darkness are round about him," this does but make room for the voice of faith—"Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." And besides the fact, that the mysteries of redemption exercise faith, and therefore demand thankfulness, we may observe generally in reference to the Bible, as before in reference to the Divine nature, that it is the sublimity which produces the obscurity. We could not rise up from the perusal of the Bible, with a deep conviction that it is the Word of the living God, had we found no occasion, on which reason was compelled to humble herself before truth, and implicit faith had been the only act which came within the range of moral achievement. Whilst, therefore, we see going forward on all sides the accumulation of the evidences of Christianity, and whilst history and science are bringing their stores and emptying them at the feet of our religion, we feel that it was so much to be expected, yea, rather that it was so much that was unavoidable, that God should hide himself whilst revealing himself as a Saviour, that we take it as the last link in a chain of lengthened and irrefragable demonstration, that whatever the Bible discloses there is much kept back. So that we virtually help the truth of the faithfulness of God by the clouds and darkness by which he is surrounded. Nor is this all; for if God, in discovering himself as a Saviour, hide much in regard to the machinery of redemption, does he not also hide much in regard to its individual application? How secretly the Holy Spirit enters into the heart of man! How completely has God hidden, except as displayed in its effects, the intense and energetic operation of this Divine Person! Who shall bring to light the secret springs of a soul's conversion? "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Who can explain how the uncreated gales of the Spirit sweep over the dull chords of the human heart?—how they breathe on them the melodies of glad tidings, and awaken strains of glory, honour, and praise unto him who is invisible? But though the agency be hidden, such strains are awakened; yea, and we are bold to say, that the very concealment heightens the ascription of praise. The man feels in himself a new creation; and perceiving that Satan's kingdom has been overthrown by a stone, like that in prophecy "cut out of the mountain without hands," he dares not look at second causes. It were impious to speak of it as human; the secresy stamps the Divinity. He recognises Deity in the Saviour, because the Saviour hath hid himself. Oh! what is there which more persuades the true believer of his having to do with a gracious and a faithful God, than his finding himself as nothing more than clay in the hands of a potter, the subject of inscrutable operations, but those operations all tending to his being "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?" Why, then, should he not follow up the words, "Clouds and darkness are round about him?" with a declaration which should indicate confidence and thankfulness—"Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne?"

II. And now let us turn to the second division of the subject, and consider how clouds and darkness are round about God, in his dealings with his creatures.

This is true, first of all, in providential dispensations. God does not lay open the reasons of his appointments; he does not explain why prosperity should be allotted to one man, and adversity to another. In affliction, for example, our cry is most commonly like that of Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." The wicked, moreover, often flourish like a green bay tree, whilst the righteous are cast down, and given over to the extremes of misery and destitution. Evil, too, is permitted to stalk unblushingly abroad, whilst "wisdom crieth" in vain "in our streets." Indeed there is much of cloud in all this, and much of obsurity, which may well overtask any earthly philosophy. But we contend, that what is thus hidden furnishes matter of confidence and thankfulness; for man is hereby thrown upon his faith, and faith, as we have already said, gives most honour to God, and is the best discipline for ourselves. And although such reasoning includes only a small portion of mankind, namely, those who in heart and in soul are dedicated to God, yet let it be remembered, that there is approaching a day of solemn rètribution; a day when every human action shall have its recompense, and every Divine proceeding its vindication. And when the Almighty Judge shall reduce to order every discordant element; when all secret things shall be brought to light, and the discrepancies of ages reconciled in a moment; when the reasons of each permission, the design of each allotment, the intention of every dealing shall flash forth from the open book of Providence, so that the gathered universe shall read the combined mercy and wisdom,—will there not, think you, come forth from unnumbered multitudes such an ascription of glory that all was thus hidden—an ascription from the mouths of the lost as well as of the redeemed—that there shall seem no comparison between the honour which would now be given to God, were he pleased to make each dealing plain, and that which shall be wrung from countless generations, when the mysteries of time shall all be cleared up, ere time itself be buried in eternity? Then, indeed, with an emphasis which we can scarcely now emulate, will the one declaration follow on the other. If "clouds and darkness are round about him," who will then deny that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne?"

Or again: "who knoweth the day of his death?" Here, once more, are the clouds and the darkness. "One dieth," saith Job, "in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them." Nature has been ransacked for imagery;

the shortness of our days is on every man's tongue; and everything that is fleeting, and everything that is fragile, and everything that is uncertain, has been laid under contribution to furnish similitudes for a human life-time. It is a most trite, but melancholy saying, that no man is able to reckon on to-morrow. Then is it not an evidence of God's faithfulness, of his regard for the creatures of his hand, that we cannot reckon on to-morrow? Such is the constitution of our nature, that if a fixed period were allotted to our days, the thought even of the distant hour would in most cases prove an insupportable burden; for, strange as it may seem, the certainty that the evil day would arrive after a given number of suns had risen and set, would be far more grievous and irksome, than the present uncertainty whether it may not come to-morrow; and men who can be cheerful in acting on the consciousness that they may perhaps die the next minute, would be depressed and overborne by the positive assurance that they should live ten more years, but not a moment longer. Under such circumstances the business of the world would be almost at a stand. Men's morose and gloomy employment would be the telling over the sum of their remaining weeks. One would think it useless to plan what he should not live to execute, and another to sow what he should not be permitted to reap; and thus the whole fabric of human society would crumble away and fall, just because its several members knew the periods of their respective dissolutions. A community, every member of which could define with unerring precision the day of his death, must be a community devoid of that incessant and pains-taking activity, through which alone well being, whether public or private, can be secured and maintained. Neither is it only on the structure and interests of society, that acquaintance with the day of death would tell fatally and powerfully; there would result none but an injurious effect to the interests of piety. We hold that such must be the case even with the righteous. There would be required little or nothing of that watchfulness which they must now give to the keeping their lamps trimmed and their lights burning. There would be no demand for that godly anxiety to be found on their guard, which now forbids their being remiss in the service of their Master. And when the time of their departure drew nigh, even if the mind were not overwhelmed by the contemplation, there would be no place for meekness, none for resignation, none for the perfect work of patience. The precise knowledge when all was to end would pass like a blight on all those softer graces of piety, whose very existence presupposes that everything must be left to the unknown will of our heavenly Father; and there could be nothing of that "hoping and quietly waiting for the salvation of God," which, pronounced a good" by the prophet, has been proved by the experience of the church the best discipline for immortality. And as for the sinner, who has the hardihood to defer repentance, though for anything he can tell he may die in an hour, would he not give an unbridled rein to every lust, if assured of impunity for ten, twenty, or thirty years? And when the sand was almost out, and he knew that there scarce remained any grains in the life-glass, would not his consciousness that so little time was left, and that so much had been squandered, tend to produce despair rather than penitence; to bind him to the persuasion that it was now too late, rather than to urge him to an endeavour to lay hold on a Redeemer? He would put off the matter of salvation to the last year,—'there would be time enough then'; afterwards to the last month, and then to the last week, and then to the last day, persuading himself that even an hour would suffice;

the certainty that he could not be taken by surprise, rendering him inaccessible to the most powerful motives by which we ply those who cannot reckon on a second. And when, after this long course of disobedience and procrastination, he knew that his grave was actually being dug, and that after fifty or a hundred beats of the pendulum, he should be stretched out a corpse, we think the probability would be, that the certainty which had heretofore led him to be insolent in his impiety, would now cause him to be seized with all the agonies of uncontrollable dread; and that, overwhelmed with horror, he would stagger out of life, no sin repented of, no faith fastened on the Surety of the fallen. Sickness could never alarm; the death of neighbours could never admonish, the voice of Providence could never arouse; for under a dispensation with no clouds and no darkness, each man would be involved in his own selfishness, having nothing to fear for himself from what he beheld overtaking his fellows. And if all these results, each baneful and detrimental, would follow from our acquaintance with the time of our dissolution, shall it be denied, that in hiding that time from us God displays all those attributes which we necessarily ascribe to the moral Governor of the Universe? And have we not then fresh reason, from the utter obscurity in which the day of his death is shrouded—have we not fresh reason for adding to the confession, "Clouds and darkness are round about him," the triumphant acknowledgment, "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne?"

And once more, there is much hidden from us respecting the nature of a future state. Here, again, are clouds and darkness which God himself throws around it. With the strong figures of high-wrought diction, and the bold imagery of lofty parable, the joys of the righteous and the woes of the wicked are briefly, but powerfully pourtrayed. There is enough disclosed to stimulate zeal, and enough to scare from transgression; but still, whilst the heirs of immortality are clothed with corruption, they see only "through a glass darkly," and neither the harpings of glorified spirits nor the wailings of the ruined convey more than a feeble metaphor of futurity. There is still much to exercise faith, still much to occupy hope; and we may not doubt, that our most vivid imaginings make no approach towards the majesty and the blessedness of heaven, whilst the awfulness and the wretchedness of hell outdo immeasurably the worst picturings of our most excited apprehensions. But if the veil had been more drawn back; if the heavens had stood always open to our gaze, and if these eyes of flesh could look above and behold the thrones and the mansions, and the starry crowns; or if the earth were to give up her cold tenantry, and messengers were to come from the prison-house of wretchedness, and, gliding through the ranks of the living, preach to them the secrets of the fire and the rack, and whisper to them horrors, at which the knees should knock together and the blood curdle in the heart,—what, then, we ask, would become of a state of probation? Where would be the province of faith, when everything was thus made the object of sense? Where would be the trial of hope, when every joy was thus already told? where the exercise of self-denial, when the better portion forced itself on the notice of the most unobservant, compelling by its burning manifestations the universal recognition of its superiority? And where would have been the excellency of an economy, under which a race of sinful beings could have found no place for faith, no sphere for hope, no occasion for self-denial? These, under the present dispensation, are the very stamina of the Christian life. But since, had there been no clouds, no darkness around the future, there could have been comparatively no room for the graces, which are the chief elements of godliness; since faith, and hope, and self-denial must have been almost, if not entirely, unknown things, had the firmament rung with the hallelujahs of the ransomed, and been crowded with the domes of the everlasting city, whilst ever and anon the cry of the lost spirits had come up from the depths, and the images of final wrath had broken in upon merchants in their commerce, and statesmen in their councils, and revellers at their banquet—who will deny that God should be praised for hiding as he has done the future; that it is just because he is a God of faithfulness and of judgment that he tells us so little, and only in general terms, of what is reserved for us hereafter? For it would have been in contradiction of such properties for God to have so arranged disclosures of the future that men's energies would have been repressed, rather than excited, in regard of the struggle for immortality. So that, once more, we bring you back to the original proposition. It is true that we must join in the confession, "Clouds and darkness are round about him;" but on this very account we have fresh cause to believe and to affirm, "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

We have only space to bid you extract comfort from the truth that "clouds and darkness are round about" God. In trials, in distresses, in afflictions, if we see not the clear shinings of our Father's face, shall we therefore, sit down covered with confusion and rebuke, and pronounce ourselves forgotten of the Lord? Rather let us think, he is but exhibiting that property, which should call forth our admiration and praise: for the God around whom are clouds, he is the God of righteousness and judgment. And whatever be the mystery which hangs around the ways and works, the dealings and purposes of the Almighty,—however much he may have hidden them,—we beseech of you to think how much he has revealed. There is not one thing kept back, which is essential to our entering into the promised rest. As though it were painted with sunbeams, the narrow path of eternal life runs in unbroken clearness through the deepest clouds of mystery. And when we have reached its extremity, when our foot treads its last step on earth, and we just touch the firmament, shall there be no more of clouds, no more of darkness? Indeed, brethren, we dare not say there will be none. Yet we shall "see God as he is;" we shall behold him "face to face;" we shall "know even as also we are known." And if there be anything yet concealed, we believe it will be an untold store of our Father's glory, into which it shall be our rapturous delight for ever and for ever to search. And when day by day—alas! the terms of time are weak—we speak of eternity, and yet measure by the sun; what are days, where night cannot enter?—but when there shall burst upon us fresh and beautiful discoveries of the preciousness of Christ; when the eye shall span another stage of the height, and travel another line of the depth, and take in another sweep of the breadth and length of that love, "which passeth knowledge;" shall not the crowds of admiring spirits draw near with fresh ardour to the Father's throne, and knowing that there yet remain untravelled districts, cast their crowns at his feet, and exclaim in rapture and in admiration, "Clouds and darkness are round about him?" What then? We learn more and more, that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

THE PROSELYTISM OF ERROR.

A Sermon

Delivered on Tuesday Morning, June 17, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

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AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"For they sleep not, except they have done mischief: and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall."—Proverbs iv. 16.

It is of the wicked that Solomon here speaks; the wicked, whether the dissolute or the heretical are they of whom he declares that their "sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall." What a restlessness does this indicate! what a zeal in a bad cause! Would that it could be equally said of good men, "Their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to rise!" Would that there was as much zeal for the propagation of truth as for the propagation of falsehood; for the prevalence of virtue as for the prevalence of vice! There, then, is a great and interesting subject of discourse, the earnestness, the superior earnestness, of evil men in the diffusion whether of their belief or of their practice: and that you may get a better hold of this subject, we will glance for a moment at one of the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The ordinary style of our Saviour's ministration was, as you must all be aware, gracious and compassionate: his discourses, like his miracles, indicated a being full of tenderness towards those amongst whom he moved; but occasionally he assumed the character of a herald of vengeance; the arm which was commonly stretched forth to defeat disease and scatter blessings on the wretched, was sometimes waved, like that of Moses, to summon up plague and darkness; and the tongue which generally pronounced only benediction, and whence dropped accents gentle as the dew, could pour forth at times most fearful denunciations; utterances at which the inanimate creation might have quailed, though human hearts were too hard to be softened or subdued. In the 23rd chapter of St. Matthew's gospel you have a most remarkable instance of a departure from Christ's ordinary course, of his changing his tone from that of meekness and entreaty to that of vehemence and indignation. On a sudden, after delivering exhortations to his disciples, warning them against the Pharisees and Scribes, he brake into the sternest and most overwhelming denunciation of those who were at once the leaders and the deceivers of the people: he hurries on from one woe to another, seizing successively on the enormities of which he unerringly knew the Scribes and Pharisees to be guilty, and taking occasion from each to give assurance of vengeance. It is as though he had been unable any longer to restrain his swelling emotions: he had dealt graciously and tenderly with his enemies, hoping and striving to win them by his gentleness, but seeing them still bent on his destruction, and knowing their utter vileness of character, he threw off all restraint, and launched woe after woe till there scarce seemed to remain ought, whether in upbraiding or in threatening, to be added to the fearful proclamation. And amongst the woes thus denounced there is one which associates itself very closely with the words of Solomon in our text, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." Compass sea and land to make one proselyte! There, indeed, is unsparing diligence in making converts, yet it was the diligence of wicked men, and it was conversion to a bad cause. The men are themselves called children of hell, and the convert becomes twice as deserving of so fearful a title. Thus, then, you get hold of our subject of discourse. I am not so much to prove to you how great and intense a zeal there is in the diffusion of error, for this is affirmed to you in Scripture: we are rather to examine into its causes and the lessons which it furnishes. Come, then, you now understand what we are about to discuss: we are going to speak to you of the restless activity of evil men in the propagation of evil—a restless activity such, that it may be declared of them in the language of our text, "they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall."

Now, we may, for the sake of illustration, still refer to the case of the Scribes and Pharisees: they had a revelation from God and an acquaintance with his nature and will, which was then withheld from every nation but the Jews. They might, then, not only have lawfully desired to make proselytes from the heathen; they would have been criminal indeed if indifferent to the diffusion of the truth; but their zeal was not so much a zeal for converting the heathens as for swelling the ranks of their own sect or their own party. It was not, probably, from idolatrous tribes that they sought proselytes with the eagerness which our Saviour has alleged; it was rather from amongst their own countrymen, the desire of being more powerful than the Sadducees, urging them to increase the number of their partizans or adherents; it was not the accession to the faithful worshippers of Jehovah, but the accession to the followers of their own corrupt system; it was not an honest desire for the propagation of truth by which they were stimulated, but a sinful longing to gain sway for their creed, whatever might be its errors or whatever its falsehoods. Of course I know very well what may be said against this; it may be said that the Pharisees and the Scribes may have been thoroughly persuaded of the truth of their own creed, and that with such a persuasion they only did what they were bound to do in compassing sea and land to make one proselyte. Evil men may be quite convinced that truth is on their side; and are they, then, to be blamed if they sleep not except they make others to fall? Allowing that a man firmly believes the doctrines which he professes to believe, is it not his duty to use every possible means for their wide dissemination? Ought he, at least, to incur a special malediction as the missionary of a system of which he is the honest and the faithful adherent? We reply, that this opens up the often agitated question as to whether or not men are accountable for their belief—a question to which we can only see one answer, unless you will charge upon God the sins and mistakes of his creatures. If God have not sufficiently defined truth and falsehood; or if he hath so constituted certain men that they cannot distinguish with clearness between the two, then indeed there may be such a thing as unavoidable error, and the case of a sincere inquirer after truth, who nevertheless, through no fault of his own, is ultimately landed in falsehood. Every one must see that on such a supposition God is represented as leading men wrong, or at least (and this is much the same thing), as not putting it in their power to go right, and such representation is so distinctly at variance with every notion which even natural religion furnishes of God, and yet more with all the statements of revealed, that we see not how it can be for a moment upheld unless Scripture be rejected, and with it the theology which even reason lays down. That you are, therfore, accountable for what you believe, just as much as for what you do, may be taken as a proposition which follows immediately on another which ought to be self-evident, that God has placed it in every man's power to know right from wrong; to distinguish between falsehood and truth. They may talk of unavoidable, and therefore innocent, Deism; of unavoidable, and therefore innocent, Socinianism, as though a candid and unprejudiced mind might, through a process of fair and careful inquiry, reach the conclusion that the Bible is a forgery, or Christ a mere creature. But I know what I must admit in admitting this unavoidableness: I must own that God has not given sufficient evidence of the truth of his Word, or sufficient attestation to the Divinity of his Son, and I cannot admit this; anything rather than this. The necessary consequence of representing man as excusable in regard to the errors of his creed is the representing God as causing or occasioning these errors; but we reject such a representation as a distinct impeachment of the character of our Maker, and we exclaim with the apostle, "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar." And when we have once certified ourselves that a man is accountable for his creed as well as for his practice—accountable inasmuch as it must be through his own fault that he believes what is false, just as much as it is through his own fault that he does what is wrong; we take away all force from the objection, that they who sleep not except they bring over others to what themselves hold to be true, are performing a duty rather than committing a sin. I might have persuaded myself that poison is nutritious, no matter how the persuasion has been reached, through what false reasoning, or what perverted facts; it may be thoroughly wrought in my mind, and I may be as satisfied as to my being in the right as though the conclusion had been reached from a rigid process of analytical deduction. Shall I then be warranted, shall I be innocent in endeavouring to induce others to adopt my theory, and to substitute poison for food, or wherein shall I be blameworthy in entering on the wholesale murder of mankind, seeing I shall only be attempting the propagation of a tenet of whose truth I have myself a most thorough conviction? Why, the fault does not lie so much in diffusing what I believe as in believing what I might have proved to be false. If through no fault of my own I believed poison to be food, I should scarcely be guilty in striving to make others believe it too; but I am answerable for my erroneous opinion, and therefore for all the consequences to which that opinion might lead; I might have known better; I might have reached an opposite conclusion; it cannot have been through anything but wilful blindness or inveterate prejudice that I have settled myself in a belief so monstrous and so wild, and having been myself the author of the delusion, I am myself chargeable with all the evil to which that delusion may give rise; I may believe that I am perfectly sincere; I may be actuated by the desire of disseminating what I believe to be true, and it may seem to be a positive duty to bring others to the same opinion with myself: but I shall be a murderer in the sight of both God and of man, notwithstanding all this boasted honesty of purpose; a murderer on the principle that being answerable for a cause I am answerable for an effect; that having wilfully brought myself into the belief of a lie, I have wilfully committed whatever evils that lie may produce. The case is precisely the same with the propagation of any false doctrine. An Atheist may be a thorough believer in Atheism; a Socinian in Socinianism; and then the zeal in making proselytes to error may be represented as not only pardonable, but commendable, seeing that it must be every man's duty to disseminate what he believes to be true; but it is not so much for teaching falsehood as for believing it that we bring a heavy charge against the apostleship of error. We deny that there can be any such thing as unavoidable Atheism or unavoidable Socinianism—Atheism or Sociniasm at which a man has arrived from earnest and unprejudiced inquiry. On the principle already laid down, we affirm it to be a man's fault, and therefore a man's own crime, if he put darkness for light, falsehood for truth. But if it be his crime that he holds error, it must also be his crime that he spreads error. Acquit him of sin in the believing of falsehood, and I might admire his zeal in making proselytes to the falsehood; but convict him of sin in respect of his creed, and I must place it as a stigma upon him, that "his sleep is taken away, unless he cause some to fall." The Roman Catholics, for example, can they be blamed—are they not rather to be applauded—for their zeal in winning others to what they believe to be true? Indeed, there is nothing to be said for Roman Catholics but what might have been equally said for the Pharisees and Scribes, who possibly were devoted to the disseminating only what they were sincere in believing; yet our Lord, as we have seen, breathed a woe against the Pharisees and Scribes on the very ground of their proselyting zeal; and the same woe, on the same ground, might be breathed against the Papists; for are the errors of Popery such that a man may examine with a candid, unprejudiced mind, and yet fail to detect them? Then they are not errors: that cannot be falsehood in religion which an honest and prayerful inquirer concludes to be truth. The Roman Catholic might prove himself wrong, and therefore he is not necessarily to be commended because he is zealous in gaining others to what he believes is right. We wish you to have a right understanding on the point where mistakes may easily be made. The Roman Catholic is admired and applauded for his proselyting zeal, and the Protestant is upbraided for his comparative lukewarmness in diffusing his principles. The upbraiding is in every way just. It is a disgrace to us to be outdone by the Papist in activity in spreading what we hold to be true; but, nevertheless, the zeal of the Roman Catholic may be provoking the anger of God, nay, must be, unless Popery be true and Protestantism falsehood, for it is zeal in disseminating what might be proved to be error; and if a man teach for truth, what he might know to be falsehood, he is as guilty as if he gave for food what he might know to be poison. Do you admire the zeal of the Socialist, who uniformly strives to gain adherents to a system which can prevail only through the loss of all morality, and rise only on the ruins of what is precious and beautiful? No, you execrate the man; you regard his zeal as you would that of a man who should move through the land to spread plague or diffuse a famine. And why? May not the Socialist really believe in the excellency of his system; and if persuaded that his theory is true, is he not excusable, rather is he not praiseworthy, in doing all in his power to procure its extension? But if the Socialist really believes what he teaches, he must believe through the wilfully closing his eyes. His belief must result from his prejudices, his passions, and his desires; and a belief so produced, does but stamp with atrociousness all the energy to which it may prompt. It is the same in its measure with the holders of any false and spurious system of religion; it was the same with the Pharisees and Scribes. The false system for which converts are sought may be thoroughly believed by those who sleep not through zeal in making many converts, but the fact of its being false proves its adherents blameworthy in holding it, and, therefore, also blameworthy in diffusing it. So that, it is not needful that we inquire into the sincerity of men with regard to the articles of their creed. We may assume that they propagate only what they actually believe, nevertheless, inasmuch as it could be only their crime to believe error, we denounce it as their crime to dissemminate error; and thus we may bring it against them as a weighty, nay, an overwhelming charge, that "they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall."

Now, let us survey the alleged fact under a different point of view. It is a very extraordinary measure of zeal which is here attributed to the wicked; just as the Scribes and Pharisees were represented as compassing sea and land to make a single proselyte. You may well wonder at the energy which a bad cause could command. Alas! when shall there be cause to say of ourselves, that we cannot sleep for anxiety for the welfare of others; that we would compass sea and land to win one soul to Christ? That desire requires to be stimulated by the prospect of converting thousands, and often when the undertaken thing is the evangelizing vast realms of heathenism, how much is there which makes the slightest approach to the assiduousness described in the text? Certainly, it would seem as though error were far more energetic than truth. There is no need to confine the text to any one special case. We may take it as a general history of the children of evil, that they are devotedly zealous in diffusing that evil; and we do not mean by a single word to take off from the severity of the reproach which the zeal of error throws upon the apathy of truth. We confess, indeed, that it ought to cover the Christian and the Protestant with shame, that he is commonly outdone in his endeavours to gain proselytes to his creed by those who deceive themselves and have only a false system to press upon others. If there is a contrast which should move us in this day, it is that between the Roman Catholic or the infidel, compassing sea and land to make one proselyte, and ourselves, who move but slowly and reluctantly towards fields which are white with the harvests of hundreds of years. And I cannot make this admission without pausing to remind you that the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel holds its Anniversary this week; that this afternoon at St. Paul's, and on Thursday at the Mansion House, it comes, as it were, into the city to seek from our merchants, from our bankers, and our traders, support in the work of carrying the gospel to the farthest ends of the world. Give it your assistance; and do not by your languid help add force to the already disheartening comparison of zeal for what is wrong as set against zeal for what is right.

We are forced, as we have already said, to admit that falsehood in this respect generally carries it over truth; but when this has been admitted in its largest extent, it remains a question well worthy of being examined, why should falsehood be thus zealous in diffusing itself? Allowing that it sets an example; allowing that it addresses a rebuke to truth; how are we to account for its being so surprisingly energetic and devoted; for its manifesting a desire to labour for its own propagation which could not be exceeded were it stamped by the signet of heaven and animated by the Spirit of God? We will pause a few moments and examine the fact, for fact it undoubtedly is, that the holders of falsehood are commonly more earnest in diffusing their tenets, not only than the holders of truth, but even than those holders would be were their zeal more commensurate than it is with their office as disciples of Christ. There are many reasons, but all drawn from the nature of error, which go to the explaining this singular phenomenon. The holder, for example, of falsehood, may make religion a matter of party; he has the same interest in gaining proselytes as though he belonged to a fraction in the state which struggled with another for ascendancy; whereas, truth rejects the motives, so congenial to men, of rivalry and competition, and requires to be taught for its own sake, and not for that of a denomination or a sect. I know of course that truth as well as falsehood may be diffused from secular motives; but not, be it observed, by its sincere and cordial disciples; these cannot do it such violence as to prostitute it to the ends of party, though hypocrites may use it for selfish purposes. Error is that which the warmest adherent may support from pride, or jealousy, or ambition, but truth is that which can enlist these passions in none but the hypocrite. No marvel, then, that error should be even more zealous to make proselytes than truth. It can work on all the corruptions of our nature, whereas truth has to hold those corruptions in check; though this is not the only nor the chief reason to be given why falsehood cannot sleep unless it cause some to fall. Do you look with surprise on an infidel labouring night and day to make infidels of others? I do not share that surprise. I admit it to be a monstrous thing that a man should be eager to undermine Christianity, seeing that he has, at least, nothing better to substitute in its stead; and that even if it be a delusion, it is not only harmless but wondrously beneficial; and yet I do not wonder that the holder of infidelity should be also its apostle, that he who rejects Christianity himself should ever be on the watch to bring others to reject it. It is the property of falsehood to be restless and uneasy; it belongs to truth alone to be tranquil and at peace. The infidel wants associates; the secret and gnawing suspicion of his being in the wrong obliges him, in a sort of self-defence, to strive to gird himself with companions whose numbers may inspire him with something like confidence. The Christian is supported from within, but the infidel must be supported from without. To be alone is to be in terror, haunted by forebodings which he cannot repress, chased by phantoms which he cannot disperse. They may talk of the composedness of infidelity. I read its agitation in compassing sea and land to make one proselyte, in its sleep going from it, except it makes some to fall. It is not love for men, nor desire for the extension of human happiness, which urges it to efforts to unchristianize others. We will not do even the infidel the injustice of supposing that he really thinks it would be bettering the condition of society to take away the restraints which the gospel imposes and extinguish the hopes which the gospel illumines. But he cannot rest; his creed forces him into activity, that he may smother the suspicion which its own monstrousness generates. Zeal to convert others, is but zeal to confirm himself. And we believe that something similar might be affirmed of every kind, and of every measure of error. Its disciples are industrious in its propagation, from a sense of uneasiness or dissatisfaction, which compels them to be earnest in seeking that countenance which a multitude of associates is felt to impart. It is the same principle which leads a vicious man to strive to make others vicious—he wants companionship, because to sin with a crowd, though it cannot be safer than to sin by one's-self, gives a greater sense of security, and the common danger to which thousands are exposed, will almost look as divided amongst them, so that each individual has but a fraction in the place of the whole of the risk. And we reckon it a high testimony which God compels error to bear against itself, that it cannot be at rest, but must ever be seeking for external support. We know that the feeling which is ordinarily produced by the exhibition of a zeal which compasses sea and land to win a convert to falsehood, is a feeling of wonder that there can be such energy on the side of deceit; or of indignation that there should be far less on the part of truth. We may participate in the feeling of indignation, but we do not share as we have already said in the feeling of wonder. We set aside what in a variety of cases will have no inconsiderable influence—the desire of making proselytes in order to advance the interests of party; we confine ourselves simply to the fact, that it is error which is so industriously propagated, and we hold it to be in the nature of error to be thus energetic and unwearied. A system of proselyteism is a system of self-devotion; it cannot retire into itself, and thereby entrench within its own proofs and principles; it must always be on a crusade abroad, if it would maintain anything like peace at home. I could be happy as a believer in the midst of infidels, but I could not be happy as an infidel in the midst of believers. I do not mean that as a believer I should care nothing for the prevailing infidelity. It would necessarily grieve me, and my desire and my endeavour must be to bring others to the same creed with myself, but my belief will be unaffected by the surrounding infidelity. The witness is within me, and I should not need associates to produce or uphold the conviction of being right. Not so, however, were I an infidel amongst believers. The internal witness is then against me, and I must seek to silence or balance it by external support. Think not, therefore, that it is in the least evidence in favour of a doctrine, that they who hold it are ready to undertake or undergo almost anything in order to effect its diffusion. This rule would make Popery a system of truths and even verify infidelity. This would gain our reverence for the tenets of the Pharisees and Scribes in the face of the indignant denunciations of Christ. Rather learn, that though eagerness to make proselytes ought to distinguish truth, yet with a corrupt nature like our own, it is more likely to distinguish falsehood. It is not in self-defence that truth seeks proselytes; it is in self-defence that error seeks proselytes. Truth has no suspicions for which to seek refuge in a crowd; truth has no anxieties to allay, no uneasiness to appease. Motives of love and gratitude may, and should excite it to attempt its diffusion; but that diffusion is not needed to its assurance or its confidence. Whereas falsehood has its doubts which disturb the restless spirit, the secret consciousness of being a delusion; and they know little of error who can wonder, however they may lament, that falsehood driven by its uneasiness should be even more intent in making proselytes than truth when excited by its gratitude. I will take a lesson—a lesson I bid you take, and show that you take it by joining heart and hand in missionary enterprise—I will take a lesson from the infidel, from the Roman Catholic, from the Pharisee; a lesson on the duty of making every sacrifice, declining no toil, that the pure gospel of Christ may be widely disseminated, seeeing that it is palpably our disgrace, and may be finally our condemnation, that the better taught in doctrine should be inferior in zeal. But I will take also another lesson, a lesson as to the unquietness and dissatisfaction of falsehood. I learn more and more that it is the characteristic of error to be like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. I am not moved by the manifested zeal to suspect that truth must die with the industrious disseminators of their creed; I am rather taught by their industry what a void there is always at heart where God and his Christ are not simply received. Yes, thus the mystery departs. That falsehood should have a missionary spirit follows on the fact of its being falsehood, and therefore forced to lean upon others for support. And I am only the more persuaded of the errors of evil when I hear of these men as verifying the description which Solomon gave: "They sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall."

Now, there is a great deal in our own day to give importance to the somewhat difficult examination on which we have entered: there is a most sleepless zeal in making proselytes to error, a zeal unsparing, whether of time or of expense; and it is the fashion not only to set up this zeal for imitation, which is so far just, as that the enemies of truth ought not to be suffered to outdo the friends of truth, but even to represent it as necessarily commendable, just as though men must be praiseworthy in teaching what they believe, or as though zeal might be taken as some index of truth. Our text is very useful in setting such matters right, and so is Christ's denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees. Launching woe against those who compass sea and land to make one proselyte, our Lord taught that it may be a crime, not a virtue, to disseminate our creed; a proposition which is readily vindicated, if we remember that we are answerable for what we believe, and therefore answerable for what we teach. And having thus told us, that there may be guilt in diffusing where there is belief in the tenets diffused, such passages of Scripture set us on inquiring how error comes to be so eager for proselytes; an inquiry which issues in our finding that error from its very nature must be restless and diffusive. I long to see the Protestant church as active as the Roman Catholic; but I should not then take its activity as any necessary proof of its purity. Doctrines are to be examined in themselves and brought to the standard of the Bible, and those which are false are even more likely than those which are true to excite and sustain a proselyting energy. You see this in the case of converts to error; they are sure for a time to outdo in zeal those who seduced them from truth. No wonder the proselyte is not easy in his new creed; falsehood galls and frets where it rests until it have hardened the heart and seared the conscience; so that, whilst it is yet a fresh guest, it will force its recipient into activity on its behalf, that he may hide from himself his own fears and suspicions. Let it not be imagined, that the zeal of proselytes to popery or infidelity, is any reason for concluding that Popery has the advantage of Protestantism, or that the infidel is nearer truth than the believer. "It is good," saith St. Paul, "to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" but it is not necessarily a good thing in which men are zealously affected. The proselytes made by the Pharisees outdid the Pharisees in all that distinguished the sect. But our Lord's way of describing this zealous devotedness was, that the Pharisees made their proselytes twofold more the children of hell than themselves. Never could the blessed Redeemer have applied such a term, whether to teachers or to proselytes, had it not been purely men's own fault that they were led into error; and had not the disseminating falsehood been in every case a crime, a thing which witnessed against its holders in place of pleading on their behalf; for so evil a title as the child of hell can be applicable to no man who has not wilfully and wantonly resisted those influences which are vouchsafed to every one within the pale of the visible church, and thus become accountable for all the errors into which he might fall, seeing that he has driven from himself the infallible guide which would certainly have kept him in the pathway of truth. And so it ought to be a great comfort to know that error is not an unavoidable thing; that we may plead with the arguments and insinuations of the Deist, or the Papist, or the Socinian, but so long as we search after wisdom, in humble dependance on the teachings of the Holy Ghost, we shall be in no danger of giving ear to falsehood. The perilous thing is pride. I have little hope for any of you, who, in days when sleep is taken away from men unless they cause some to fall, cherishes pride under whatever form or whatever disguise: he is just a fit subject for the missionary of falsehood, seeing that inasmuch as God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the lowly, he is without those assistances through which alone we can stand fast in the faith and acquit ourselves like men. On the other hand, I have no fears for the weakest among you, if he be but diffident in himself and confident in the Spirit of God. There is much said of the subtlety of error, of the plausibleness of the statements of Popery, and of the difficulty of their being withstood by the weak and untutored. Undoubtedly error is subtle and plausible; it glided in at first in the form of a serpent, and hath ever since been an adept in craft and insinuation; but God's Spirit will suffer no man to be shaken in his belief of what is true, or seduced into the belief of what is false, who inwardly supplicates his aid and implicitly trusts in his guidance. You have therefore your defence, you have therefore your safeguard. I do not send you to the volumes of learned divines, though I would that those of you who have leisure would employ it in strengthening their acquaintance with the evidence of Christianity and with the doctrines of Protestantism. What we commend most earnestly to all is, the culture of a meek and teachable spirit, a watchful resistance to pride, and a prayerful dependence on the Holy Ghost. There may be tokens of the advance of Popery; there may be tokens of the pride of infidelity; but you are not exposed to danger, except you expose yourselves. Be proud, self-confident, remiss in prayer, and when the enemy shall come in like a flood, there will be nothing to be looked for but your treason and your apostacy; but be humble and diffident, look always to the Holy Spirit as your guardian and guide; shun grieving him as you would wounding yourselves, and resisting him as you would the destroying yourselves, and you shall be made more than conquerors through him that loved you.

THE FORERUNNER, AND THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 24, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."—Malachi iii. 1.

It admits of no question amongst Christians, that these words, which have already been read to you, in the first lesson of this morning's service, refer to our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and to his forerunner John the Baptist. The ancient Jews never questioned that the Messiah was referred to, and the modern would as little doubt of the bearings of the passage, if it did not, when thus interpreted, condemn them for rejecting our Lord. It is clear, that if the Messiah be intended, he can only come whilst the temple stands ready for his reception; and if this does not strictly prove that Christ must have come before the second temple was overthrown, it proves at least, that for many centuries the Jews have had no right to expect a deliverer, forasmuch as no third temple has arisen in Jerusalem. And yet, according to our text, it is to his temple that the messenger of the covenant shall suddenly come. We need not, however, occupy your attention with the justice of applying the passage to Christ. To ourselves you who admit the Divine authority of the New Testament writings, there can be no doubt whatever of the fitness of the application. The Old Testament scripture had been closed by the writings of Malachi; for the space of about 400 years neither prophecy nor miracle had been known in Judea; but, as if to connect the new dispensation with that which it was appointed to supersede, the angel who descends after this long cessation of miracle and prophecy, foretels the very same event and in the very same words as Malachi in winding up the volume of the law and the prophets. The concluding words of the Old Testament declare, "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." The angel who announced to Zacharias the birth of a son—and this you will observe was the first of the new communications from heaven—declares, "he shall go before him in the spirit, and power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children." Thus with a beautiful accuracy were the two dispensations linked together; the person on whom attention was turned by the concluding verses of the Old Testament is brought to our notice by the introductory verses of the New. It cannot be doubted that the messenger or forerunner spoken of in our text is the being thus meant to connect the Christian with the Jewish dispensation. In fact, the very words were quoted by Christ as applied to the child of Zacharias: he said of the Baptist, "This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." Come, then, let us first consider John the Baptist as a kind of connecting link between the law and the gospel; we shall then be ready to examine those portions of our text which have to do with our blessed Redeemer himself, which call him "the messenger of the covenant," and which declare that he shall suddenly come to his temple; "Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."

I. Now, John the Baptist, rude in dress and almost wild in habits, displayed much of the austerity of the prophets of old; he might thus be said to have emblematically taught that though the law was about to be swept away as a covenant of works, there was not to be introduced any system but one of strict and self-denying morality; at the same time, forasmuch as he preached the baptism of repentance, and not one of mere ceremonial purification, it became evident that the long twilight of figure and type was about to be succeeded by the clear day of spiritual and heart-work religion. So that John the Baptist occupied a most singular position; commissioned neither to enforce the law nor to proclaim the gospel. He might almost be said to be a man of two worlds: he belonged not to the old dispensation, and neither had he entered into the fulness of the new. It was said by Christ, "the law and the prophets were until John;" but in another place he declared of the Baptist, "The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." And if the law and the prophets were only until John, and if John, nevertheless, were less than the least in the gospel dispensation, it certainly follows that John stood mysteriously between the law and the gospel, being neither instructed to marshal the shadows nor privileged to exhibit the substance. And yet with all this John was not ignorant of the atoning sacrifice which Jesus was to offer. From the lips of John flowed the first announcement of an expiatory sacrifice. It was John the Baptist who, looking upon Jesus as he walked, exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." It was a wonderful saying, eloquent of the universal redemption of our race; and yet, though the Baptist could make this announcement, he was, according to Christ, less than the least in the kingdom of heaven; he was not considered as brought into acquaintance with the truth of the gospel: he stood only between the law and the gospel; he was only privileged to place his foot on the frontier of the new dispensation, though he could state with such clearness as this the fulness of the atonement. And we know not what inference can be fairly drawn from this, unless that the preaching up to the death of the Redeemer, and not going beyond, is hardly to be described as the preaching of the gospel. Remembering what is told us of the Baptist, compared with what was preached by the Baptist, it follows that the man who does nothing more than point to the Lamb of God as offered for transgression, is still lingering on the boundary line between the two dispensations. How could the Baptist have been less than the least in the kingdom of heaven, if even the greatest in that kingdom have nothing more to announce than the taking away of sin by Christ's expiatory sacrifice? How could he have stood, a mysterious, lonely one, between the law and the gospel, if they who have been admitted into all the privileges of the gospel, and are commissioned to make known all the mercies and all the marvels of the gospel—if they have nothing entrusted to their care but the expatiating on the meritorious sufferings of the Redeemer? Not so; the preaching of the gospel includes a vast deal more than the showing forth the doctrine of the dying Redeemer. Upon this doctrine as a foundation rests, indeed, every other, but the superstructure is not to be confounded with the foundation; and if Christ be preached with anything ampler than the preaching of the Baptist, with, that is, a wider range than can be taken by one less than the least in the kingdom of heaven, he must be preached as a risen Saviour; he must be preached as a living Saviour; he must be preached as a glorified Saviour; and not only as the crucified Saviour, and not only as the dying Saviour. Herein it was that John understood and knew but little of the gospel, and that the discoveries opened up to him were narrow and circumscribed; he did not rest, indeed, on the sacrifices of the law, and he knew better than to think, with many of his countrymen, that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin. There had been given to him acquaintance with God's overpowering design of sending into the world a Surety for the fallen, who, standing forth immaculate in his holiness, and measureless in strength, should exhaust the wrath which had gone out against a sinful creation. He looked on to the erecting of an altar in the midst of a sin-stricken and desolate waste, and with the gaze of faith he saw the Lamb of God ascend this altar and lay himself meekly down and endure the outpourings of all those vials of indignation which must otherwise have descended drop by drop on the heads of the rebellious; but he was not privileged to carry discovery beyond this presentation of a sacrifice for sin; he saw not—at least, if allowed to see, he was not allowed to publish—the magnificent things of the resurrection and ascension; the spoiling death of his sting, and the hanging the walls of the sepulchre with the rich lamps of a far-shining hope. He may have been conscious of, he may have foreknown, that is, the tremblings of this creation; and the darkening of the heavens, whilst there went on a process of expiation, might have been on his mind whilst he marked the universe disquieted by the agony of the innocent sufferer; but though he could thus follow the High Priest to the altar, he could not gaze on that High Priest as he passed into the holy of holies; he could trace the time of his anguish, but he could not attend him to the time of triumph; and not being permitted to follow him, as it were, within the veil, he remained a stranger to those amazing offices, which Christ ever liveth to discharge on behalf of his people, the bold and unqualified proclamation of which gives its prime glory to the business of the Christian priesthood. He could not exhibit the Lamb of God as the never-failing Intercessor; he could not point to him as occupying majestically a seat at the right hand of the Father, superintending with unwearying assiduity the concerns of his church and of the meanest of its members, and awaiting the coming of a brilliant season, when, returning as a king to the scene of his warfare, he should gather together his saints and reign with them triumphantly. So it was, just because the Baptist was permitted indeed to look steadily on the cross, but not permitted to stand by that cross as the central point of a mighty system, to mark out a work of expiation, of expiation that made way for a perpetual and prevalent advocacy for the cause of the fallen—it was on this account that John could only be regarded as treading on the half-illumined space which spread between the two dispensations; blessed with more light than if he had stood altogether within the ranges of the law, but not instructed as one on whom fell the full blaze of the gospel. And in the introductory clause of my text, as well as in other portions of Scripture, this imperfect state of the Baptist is implied. He was a messenger sent to prepare Christ's way. But in every case the herald of an illustrious personage announces but part of the business on which that personage comes. The later prophets of the Jewish dispensation had prophesied with greater clearness than the earlier; as they approached nearer to the day of the Messiah, brighter and brighter streaks were seen on the horizon; and animated by the signs of the dawn, they spake more clearly of the wonders which the day-break would disclose; it being a necessary consequence of their being only heralds or forerunners, that as compared with disciples or followers their information should at best be partial and limited; therefore, whatever the advantages which the Baptist derived from the great proximity to Christ's public ministrations, he was only a forerunner, walking nearer than others to the long-heralded personage. He might consequently know more than those who had preceded him, but he was necessarily less informed than those who came after; and you may cease, therefore, to wonder that the least in the kingdom of heaven should be pronounced greater than the Baptist, though we know him to have been a person of whom it was prophetically said in a far back age, "Behold, I will send my messenger, to prepare my way before me."

Now, before we advance, we must observe the very remarkable difference between the prophecy concerning John, as delivered by Malachi, and that same prophecy as quoted by Jesus Christ. You will observe that Jehovah himself is the speaker of the words of our text; "he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts;" and the speaker describes himself as the Messiah—"I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare my way before me." And yet when the passage is brought forward in the gospel, it is so altered as to show that the Messiah was the party addressed: "I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare the way before *thee*." We do not see how the conclusion can well be avoided, that since Jehovah and the Messiah were equally the party whom John was to herald, the Messiah or the Christ, though found in fashion as a man, must have been essentially "God over all, blessed for ever more."

II. But leaving this, we have now to consider those portions of the verse which have to do with the Mediator, and not with his forerunner. Let us speak, first of all on the titles here given to Christ, "the Lord," and "the messenger of the covenant."

As to the title of the Lord, it should at once be observed that the word here used, is not the Hebrew word "Jehovah," and that, therefore, it does not carry with it any witness to the Divinity of Christ; it is a word which, though it certainly denotes dominion or superiority, is not confined to that which is Divine; it is applied to God as Almighty, Sovereign, or Universal Proprietor, but it is equally characteristic of the power of a husband over a wife, or of a master over a servant. In the 110th Psalm, the distinction is strongly marked in the Hebrew, though nearly lost in the English: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand." Jehovah said to my Lord, my Master, my Sovereign, "Sit thou on my right hand." You will remember that Christ quotes this passage when proving the fallacy of the notion that Messiah was to be David's son: "If David then called him Lord, how is he his son?" And therein lies the force of Christ's reasoning; not in the fact that David gives to Christ a title of Deity as we might hastily conclude, (for he gives him no such title at all,) but in the fact that he applies to him a title of human sovereignty, calling him his "Lord" or his "Master." If Messiah was to be nothing more than one of David's earthly descendants, then, seated as David himself was upon the throne, he could not have spoken of himself as the subject of his successor. Thus the idea of natural sonship could not be maintained, and could not be reconciled with the lordship which the Psalmist acknowledged. Therefore, it is possible that even the inferior title of lord may through the nature of the context yield a witness to the Divinity of Christ. And this it does in our text, for though the word "Jehovah" is not used, nothing less than the lordship of Jehovah can answer to the language which the prophet employs: "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple." To what place? To his temple. To what lord could the temple belong, except that Sovereign Lord who dwelleth not indeed in temples made with hands, but who graciously condescended to occupy the temple at Jerusalem with signs of a peculiar presence? We will not weaken the argument by insisting on it as though it needed illustration. There can be nothing simpler or more convincing. The Lord, whose sudden manifestation is predicted, was the Lord of God's temple; God's temple was his temple; and if that does not prove that he was himself God, we must give up all marks of distinction between certainty and uncertainty, falsehood and truth.

Turn then next to the second title, "the messenger of the covenant." If there be not divinity in this appellation there is much which has to do with the offices of Christ. The special business for which the Messiah was to arise amongst men, was the enacting a fresh covenant between God and the human race. We know indeed that so unmeasured is the separation between him who sitteth alone in his eternity, and creatures like ourselves, that nothing could be less warranted than the idea of a covenant entered into between God and man, at all similar to a covenant between two beings of the same nature; and, nevertheless, throughout the Bible God is represented as entering into a covenant with mankind, the phrase being used like many others when Deity is concerned, rather from its adaptation to our limited capacities than from the precision with which it defines the actual matter of fact. The only covenant which God can make with man, is one whereby he promises blessings, and at the same time prescribes conditions. The whole drawing up of the covenant must, so to speak, be with God. God proposes it, and the only thing which man can have to do, is merely to embrace it. It was exactly thus with the covenant of works. God did not enter into a treaty with man, as a prince or a conqueror enters into a treaty with a subjugated province; but he sent forth certain commandments, the obeying of which he declared should issue in life, and the disobeying in death; man's only part in the covenant being meekly to receive it, and earnestly to endeavour to act out its prescriptions; and forasmuch as it was palpable that through the infirmities of an alienated nature, the placing men under a covenant of works, was literally placing them under a fiery condemnation, so that the telling us, "I shall live if I obey," was the same thing as proclaiming to us everlasting wretchedness, it pleased God from the beginning to give intimations of another covenant, syllabled in grace and written in loving-kindness. It was this covenant, a covenant by which pardon should be proffered without money and without price to the seed of the apostate, and which, glowing with the rich pledges of honour and immortality, should demand nothing from the lost but willingness to be rescued—this covenant we say it was which briefly, but emphatically, Malachi in our text described as "the covenant." When thought and hope have long been turned on an object then to speak of the desired blessing as simply the blessing, there must be something more powerful in this than in the highest wrought sketch: it takes for granted that the blessing is uppermost in the mind. "The covenant." It were easy to show that the earlier prophets had so directed the Jews to a new covenant, which God in the fulness of time would promulge, that it was enough for the last prophet to speak of "the covenant," and all who have heard him, would enter at once into his meaning. In speaking of the messenger of "the covenant," Malachi would readily be understood as speaking of the Christ, and we have only to consider what important truths may be conveyed to us by the title.

We acknowledge that the being a messenger implies something of inferiority, since the Baptist and the Christ are alike spoken of as the messengers, as persons, that is sent, by another who has a right to their services; We confess that the Baptist and the Christ must have both been in some respects the servants of God. There is nothing to perplex us in this, if we remember that the Eternal Word, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, did literally so humble himself as to put on the form of a servant. We perceive that in describing the Christ as Lord, and as messenger, Malachi wound up the Old Testament canon, by distinctly teaching the Jews that the long promised Deliverer should be an illustrious combination of the nature which governs and the nature which serves. We find the Divine nature in the first title, we find the human in the second. It is enough to declare that Messiah should be the Lord to whom the temple was consecrated, and yet that he should be the messenger or Servant of Jehovah; and the noble truth is at once shadowed out, that Godhead and manhood should meet in his Person.

And such being the titles here given to Christ, let us see how the whole prophecy finds fulfilment in our Lord. First of all, whatever had been predicted of the forerunner of Christ, was accomplished in John the precursor of Jesus. He was literally the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and by the preaching a baptism of repentance he prepared the way for one greater than himself. Thus Jesus was heralded exactly as ancient prophecy had declared he should be heralded—God sending a messenger to prepare the way before him. It was moreover literally true that Jesus came to his temple. He came whilst the temple was standing; he taught continually in the temple, and he showed that he had a right to it as his own, by the holy zeal with which he expelled from its courts the buyers and sellers of merchandize. There may be some difficulty in deciding to what particular event we ought to refer the suddenness adverted to in our text—"And the Lord God, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." The Jews were wont to interpret the expression literally, so that they expected that after some strange unlooked for manner, the Christ would enter the sanctuary and discover himself to the nation. Perhaps it was this very expectation that served as the ground-work for Christ's second temptation. The devil placed Christ on the battlements of the temple, whilst in the court below thousands were assembled at one of the great annual feasts; he then urged him to prove himself the Son of God or the Messiah, by casting himself down and claiming homage of the congregated multitude; thus the prophecy of Malachi would be literally fulfilled; the Lord would have suddenly come to his temple, and the Jews recognizing their Leader, by this unexpectedness of appearing, would flock in crowds to support his pretensions. It was the design however of Jesus to run a lowly self-denying career, and he threw from him indignantly the suggestion of Satan. But it is not improbable that our Lord's first appearance was in the temple, and that there was an unexpectedness about this circumstance which might justly be referred to by Malachi. Whilst only a child of twelve years old, altogether unknown and unheard of, he entered into a disputation with the learned Jews, and astonished them by his preternatural wisdom. It is far from improbable, that this sudden outbreak of Deity, occurring as it did in one of the chambers of the temple, was that sudden coming of Messiah for which the people were instructed to look; and if we can vindicate the application of this part of the prophecy to our Lord, we shall hardly require to prove that he may be styled "the Messenger of the covenant." We all know that "the covenant" spoken of to Abraham and the patriarchs, promised by a long line of prophets, and mysteriously emblazoned in the sacrificial rites of Jewish worship, was brought down to our earth by Jesus of Nazareth—proclaimed from his cross, engrossed with his blood, and sealed with his grave-stone. There rested the curse on the whole family of man, there had been no removal of the malediction breathed on the apostate; millions had gone into the grave, and as yet no provision was made, that there should ever be a stir amid the long forgotten dead, and bodies rising from dishonour standing out in glory sons and daughters of the resurrection. In far off days there had indeed been intimations of brilliant destinies yet to break upon this globe, and the minds of saints in every generation had been sustained by the promises of a Deliverer who should break the fetters that had been fastened on our race, and bid that race stand up and walk in its immortality; but until the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us—until having united the Divine nature to the human, the Son of God trod the sinful earth, and measured weapons with our oppressor, and overthrew his empire, and coiled, and agonized, and bled, and died, redemption was a promised thing, but not accomplished. And our world as it rolled on amid the moving stars of the universe, had the cloud upon its mountains and the light upon its valleys, waiting to be scattered by the Messenger of "the covenant." He rose at length; this Messenger from the rightful Monarch of the land, walked to and fro among his rebellious creatures; and when it might have been expected he would send forth proclamations of wrath, and take a long delayed vengeance on the bold ones who had thrown off their allegiance, Oh! he had nothing to announce but the beautiful and touching fact, that "God sent not his Son into the world, to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." He proclaimed blessings on the part of God, he enjoined duties on the part of man; and this, as we before showed you, is in scriptural language, the making a covenant between God and man, and this covenant was emphatically "the covenant;" it was "the covenant" within whose bounds patriarchs, and kings, and prophets had prayed and wrestled to be brought; it was the covenant which, long ere written in the blood, and graven in the anguish of the Redeemer, had been opened to the gaze of the faithful, so that reading afar off the engagements of an unswerving loving-kindness they could lie down peaceful and in hope. And forasmuch as this covenant of grace was wholly negotiated by Jesus—forasmuch as he was sent hither by God for the express purpose of propounding this covenant, and of accomplishing conditions which were essential to our Creator's being just, and yet the justifier of sinners; why nothing can be more clear than that Christ came on the business of the covenant, that he was dispatched on this business, and that there is consequently a most thorough accuracy in the description of our text: "the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in."

The Lord whom ye seek, the messenger in whom ye delight. Alas! Christ may be sought with much seeming sincerity, but when it is found that he enjoins self-denial, and will not dispense with holiness, presently there is perceived in him no form nor comeliness, neither is there any beauty that men should desire him. It was thus with the Jews. For long centuries they watched eagerly and anxiously, but because the Christ came in lowliness they turned from him, and rejected him. It may be just thus with ourselves. We are ready enough to hail a Redeemer who can shield us from the pursuer and snatch us from the tormentor; but when we find that he saves none but those who humble themselves before him, who mortify the flesh and live at war with sin; Oh! a proud and sensual nature will resist, and rather crucify him afresh than close with his conditions. Let me ask, do ye delight in this messenger of the covenant? There is nothing in the play of social feelings and emotions which can accurately image what a sinner ought to feel towards his Saviour. Who has toiled for me, who has suffered for me, as Jesus toiled and suffered? Who has done a thousandth part as much to ward off from me pain and win for me happiness? If the miser delight in his wealth, let the believer delight in Jesus, for he is unto him "the pearl of great price;" if the warrior delight in victory, let the believer delight in Jesus, for through him he shall be made "more than conqueror;" if the monarch delight in his sovereignty, let the believer delight in Jesus, for he comes a second time to give the empire to his followers. Oh! that from every heart in this assembly there might go up the exclamation of the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with thee!" "Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." Yes, again, for these concluding chapters of Malachi received not an interpretation commensurate with the greatness of their expression, unless they be referred to the Second Advent as well as to the First. And since when he again appears, when he comes suddenly—for suddenly he shall come, whilst the grass is still springing in the fields, and the sun is as usual in the heavens, and marrying and giving in marriage goes on upon the earth—since when he appears, it will be to inquire whether we have adorned in all things his doctrine, "let us give all diligence, that we ma be found of him in peace," not fearing the reckoning to which we shall be called, and confiding in the blood by which we have been redeemed.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF WORSHIP.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JULY 1, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."—John iv. 23.

It is a great peculiarity of the Christian religion, and a great proof of its being from God, that it is fitted to be the religion of every age and of every country. There is nothing in its institutions, which confines it to one place rather than to another; nothing in its requirements, which makes its exercise easier at this time than at that. And herein Christianity differs widely, not only from heathenism, but also from Judaism. The heathen attached a special sacredness to some shrine or some grove: and those who could not travel to the favoured spot, were supposed to be destitute of the benefits gained by others who could undertake the journey. The Jews could perform the most solemn acts of their worship nowhere but at Jerusalem; three times in every year must all the males go up to that city. This was enough to prove that the Mosaic dispensation was not designed to be permanent, for this sufficiently proved that it could not be universal. It was clearly impossible, that Judaism could become the religion of all men, for it was clearly impossible that all men could comply with its injunctions, as to sacrifice and worship. It was a religion which had in it, indeed, the germs of a mightier and a more expansive, but which in itself was constructed only for a narrow land, and an inconsiderable people. We acknowledge, of course, that Judaism was introductory to Christianity, so that the one contained, though in contracted form and indistinct colouring, the mysteries and solemnities of the other; but if Christianity be Judaism at all, it is Judaism with the whole world for its Jerusalem. Christianity attaches no particular sacredness to certain lands or certain temples. However we may call Palestine, by way of distinction, "the holy land," and however we may regard the scenes associated with the life of our Saviour as hallowed by the miracle, and the passion, and the cross; yet the Bible does not represent Bethlehem, and Calvary, and the Mount of Olives, as holier ground than other parts of the globe. Undoubtedly that were a man, whose heart could never have throbbed at the tidings of redemption, who should feel no particular emotion, as he trod the land where Jesus walked, and stood where Jesus died; we would not give much for the warmth of that man's feeling, which burst not into an unwonted flame on spots, and amid scenes, which may be said to be yet peopled with the memory of the Redeemer; but this is nothing but the sacredness, which we naturally attach to places, where events have occurred in which we have the deepest interest. The place where a friend has died, the place where a friend lies buried, are hallowed places: we never hear the names uttered, and, still more, we never visit them, without having the mind filled with images of the past, and remembrances of those, whose memory is perhaps dearer to us, than the affection of all who survive. And this kind of sacredness must always be attached by every true Christian, to the scenes in which Christ passed his life. But it is not (if we may use the expression,) a religious sacredness. A temple built on Calvary would be no holier than a temple built on any other land; and the rites of Christian worship could not be performed with greater fitness and greater acceptance, on the spot where the cross was erected, than in any valley, or on any mountain, the most remote from Judea. This, as we at first said, is one of the great evidences of the Divine origin of Christianity. Christianity is adapted to being the universal religion; and this can be affirmed of no other religion; no other has made a church of the whole globe, placing the Deity everywhere, and everywhere the mercy-seat, so that the most solemn ordinances have no restriction, whether as to time or as to place. There is no longer a solitary holy of holies, hidden by a mystic veil: that veil has been rent; and now, wherever there is faith in Christ Jesus, God may be approached and addressed, and moved to as gracious a manifestation, as when in earlier days, his brightness rested on the ark, which was full of sacramental treasures. And all this does but verify what our blessed Lord said to the woman of Samaria in the words of our text, words which announced the introduction of a spiritual dispensation in the place of a ceremonial: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

We need hardly tell you, that the words occur in that most interesting portion of the New Testament, the narrative of Christ's conversation with the woman of Samaria, who came to draw water from Jacob's well. We may suppose you all so well acquainted with this narrative, that we need only glance at the parts which refer immediately to the subject of our discourse. By referring to events in her own life, with which, as a stranger, he could have no acquaintance had he not been a prophet, Christ had convinced the woman that he was an extraordinary person, and had induced her to ask his opinion on the controversies, which divided the Jews and the Samaritans. The Samaritans, though inhabiting the land of Judea, were not, as you know, of the posterity of Abraham, but a mixed company of several nations, transplanted thither by the king of Assyria after he led captive the ten tribes. They had at first been wholly idolaters, and then associated the worship of the true God with that of the false deities of the land whence they came. In the time of our Lord they had renounced idolatry, and having built a temple on Mount Gerizim, claimed for it a sanctity beyond that of the temple at Jerusalem. Abraham had built an altar in this place, and so had Jacob as he returned from Syria; so that they had high authority and antiquity to plead for the spot which they held specially sacred. But the Jews could appeal confidently to their sacred writings, and prove by the most explicit statements, that God had chosen the hill of Zion, and that "Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship." Thus the relative sanctity of their temples was the subject of contention; and controversy produced, as it too commonly does, a total want of charity; so that the Jews and the Samaritans had no dealings together, but regarded each the other with the most bitter hostility. It was to obtain the sentiments of one whom she perceived to be a prophet, on a point so long and so fiercely discussed, that the woman said to Christ, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; but ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. The Saviour did not immediately deliver his decision on the controversy, but declared the time to be approaching, when there should be no longer a special sacredness attached to one land, or one mountain. "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither on this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Of course he did not mean, that Samaria and Judea were to cease to be places in which God might be served; he could only mean, that all distinctions and all privileges were on the eve of abolition, so that the Father might be worshipped without respect of places. He takes occasion hence to declare, that the Jews had hitherto been right in maintaining the sanctity of their temple over that of Samaria. "Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews." It was enough thus briefly to allude to the point on which the woman, moved by feelings of curiosity and national pride, most desired information. Christ's wish was to promulgate the great truth of the abolition of distinctions; and to this therefore Christ immediately referred in the words of our text. It is as though Christ had said—'Heretofore there has been only an introductory dispensation, a dispensation beneath which the Father has but imperfectly discovered himself; and as he has commanded observances, adapted to the obscure notices which he has furnished of his nature and his will, so long as this dispensation continues the Jews are especially his people; and therefore are the Samaritans wrong in exalting their temple above that of Jerusalem. But the introductory dispensation draws fast to a close; type is to be succeeded by antitype, and shadow by substance: and when God shall have made a full and clear revelation of himself and his purposes, he will no longer choose one place rather than another in which to be worshipped; it will be "in spirit," and not with legal ceremony —"in truth," and not with symbolical institutions, that he will look to be approached: and therefore, the observance of a temporary ritual being all at an end, national distinctions will terminate, and the world in its every section be equally fit for the solemnities of acceptable worship.' "For the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

And now, what is it to worship God in spirit and in truth? And why did the Father seek such to worship him? In order to answer this question satisfactorily, we must consider the nature of God, for in a subsequent verse our Lord describes this nature, and grounds on his description the necessity for such worship as is mentioned in the text, saying, "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." Now composed as we ourselves are of body and soul, and accustomed to be acted upon through the medium of our senses, it is no way surprising, that men should have formed improper notions of the Godhead, and pictured the Divine Being under images derogatory to his nature. We are confessedly so unable to form ideas of a purely spiritual being, that it may easily happen, that, in labouring after conceptions of our Maker we should ascribe to him characteristics, which cannot belong to the Infinite and the Eternal. And therefore it is with good reason, that our Church thus begins her Articles: "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions." That Deity differs immeasurably from ourselves, is a truth which lies at the foundation of all true religion; for it is impossible we should entertain a due reverence of God, and yet invest him in any degree with our own feebleness and imperfection. Why are we to believe God to be a Spirit? Indeed, were he not a Spirit he could not possess the chief properties which belong to the Divine Being. Could God, for example, be omnipresent, if he were not a Spirit? You must all perceive, that if God had a body, it would be impossible for that body to be present in different places at the same time. A portion of his body might be here, and another portion there; but it is evidently inconsistent with the nature of a body, that the whole should be everywhere. Could God be infinite, if he had a body? We may not perhaps say there may not be an infinite body, though when we speak of a body we always suppose it has limits and boundaries. But when we are told, that the heaven of heavens cannot contain God, it is evidently meant that God is too large to be included within the vastness of space; and however we may imagine a body occupying the whole height and length and breadth of immensity, we know not how to imagine a body which more than fills the universe. So that the scriptural representations of God as infinite as well as omnipresent, seem to require us to believe that God cannot have a body, but that God must be pure spirit. We might adduce other properties of the

Divine Being, but we do not wish to entangle you in any metaphysical reasonings. Only remember that when you confess that God is a Spirit, it is rather what he is not, than what he is, that we learn from the definition. That he is a Spirit, amounts to nothing but saying he has no body. We give the name spirit to what we esteem the noblest and purest in being: and on this account God is styled a Spirit, though we apply the term equally to our own souls, and angels. But in applying it to God, it is rather with the design of excluding from him that which is corporeal, than the expressing what may be actually his nature. In that nature, he must be immeasurably removed from the highest ranks of created subsistence. An angel may be a spirit, and the Creator a Spirit, but nevertheless, there can be nothing of a community of nature. In reference to ourselves, God is called a Spirit, that we may not suppose him material like ourselves; but in reference to angels, there may be terms, (though not found in human speech,) which guard against the supposing him a spirit in no higher sense than are angels. We cannot now advance beyond the idea of a spirit; because what is spiritual is with us at the summit of what is excellent in being; but if we had the faculties of angels, and could use their speech, doubtless there would be the idea and the expression of a substance vastly more elevated, than what we now call spiritual. And this—yet oh! not this, but a substance inconceivably removed from even this, not to be comprehended by thought, and much less defined by language, would be what we assign to him, who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto. We want to stretch beyond spirit, for we cannot conceive but that the Divine nature must be infinitely removed from the angelic; but here we are lost; the mind shrinks from the attempt at crossing the boundary line of created spirit, and springing forward in search of a nature which lies immeasurably beyond. "Conceive" (as an old writer says,) "of God as existing without any imperfection, a Spirit without parts, great without quantity, perfect without quality, everywhere without place, powerful without members, understanding without ignorance, light without darkness, wise without reasoning; and, when you have risen to the highest, conceive him yet infinitely above all that you can conceive of spirit; acknowledge the infirmity of your own minds; and whatever conceptions come into your minds, say—'This is not God; God is more than this. If I could conceive him, he would not be God; for God is incomprehensibly above whatsoever I can say, whatsoever I can think, whatsoever I can conceive.'" Ay, brethren, it is always our duty to be always labouring after higher and higher conceptions of God: and it is also our duty to maintain continually the consciousness, that God is as immeasurably removed from the excellencies as from the weaknesses of creatures; that after all the journeyings of thought, we remain at an incalculable distance from just apprehensions of his nature; and if we have far truer and loftier notions of Deity than had those, who supposed the Godhead like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art or man's device, yet is the chief worth of our advance, not in our nearness to the Divine nature, but in the effect which the information should have on the worship which we tender to the invisible ruler. The duties whose performance God expects from his creatures, are proportioned to the faculties with which those creatures are endowed, and the discoveries he has made of himself and his will. It is manifest, that all acceptable worship of the Divine Being must take its character from the nature of that Being; otherwise it cannot be supposed, that the worship will be agreeable to the Being, and obtain favour in his sight. If then the Father have revealed himself as a Spirit, it will necessarily follow that a carnal and ceremonial worship cannot be that in which he will delight, and you must be quite prepared, if you are seeking an account of what service will be acceptable to the Father, for such an assertion as this: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

Now, we have shown you, that the chief perfections of God are grounded on his spirituality; so that if God were not a Spirit, he could not be the infinite, and the immutable, and the omnipresent. And these perfections are those on which prayer must be based; for we cannot give God worship, except as we judge him of a nature far removed by such perfections from ourselves, and possessing over us an unlimited sovereignty. It were comparatively useless, for example, to think of worshipping God, unless persuaded of his omnipresence: for who would pray to a being, unless assured that that being was within hearing? Now, if God were not a Spirit, we have proved that he could not be omnipresent. So that the spirituality of Deity comes into consideration in every matter of worship. The same is to be said of the unchangeableness of God. I could not pray to God, except convinced that his promises and his precepts are immutable; so that I cannot be mistaken in depending on the one, and guiding myself by the other. But God could not be unchangeable, unless purely spiritual; and thus, again, the truth that "God is a Spirit," has a bearing the very strongest on every act of worship.

Let us however examine this with a little more attention; for it is of great importance, that you should understand the reasons why God demands from you a spiritual worship. We observe then, of worship, that in rendering it, we only render unto God that honour, which he has a right to require at our hand. It is not optional, whether or no we will worship God at all; for the creature stands in such relation to the Creator, that if worship be withheld, the Divine Being is defrauded, and wrath and punishment must inevitably follow. But if it be thus imperative on us, that we worship God, it must be equally imperative, that we worship him according to his nature. If there be no correspondence between the worship and the nature; if, that is, though we know God to be a Spirit, we offer him nothing but the adoration of the body, we evidently refuse that homage which includes the recognition of the chief perfections of Deity. For these perfections pre-suppose the Divine spirituality; and this spirituality is not acknowledged by mere bodily service: and can that worship be acceptable, which keeps back the confession, nay, which might almost be said to involve the denial of the Divine properties? I might rear to God a stately temple, and dedicate to God the magnificent architecture; I might build altar on altar, and offer to my Maker "the cattle on a thousand hills;" I might cause clouds of fragrant incense to fill the sacred structure, and the swell of solemn music to bear along its aisles the praises of the Lord; but what kind of representation do I give of God, if my worship be confined to these material demonstrations? Who and what is that being, who can be delighted with the pomp of dome and of column, and take pleasure in "the burnt offerings of rams and the blood of fed beasts"—and be propitiated by costly perfumes, and soothed by instrumental melody? Is it the God that fills heaven and earth, whom I have sufficiently honoured by building a dwelling place? Is it the God who is of so refined and unsearchable a nature, that no man hath seen him or can see, to whom I can present an appropriate oblation in bringing the blood of slain victims, and the smoke of incense, and the peals of harmony? Oh! who would not then conclude, if God could be satisfied with this material worship, that God himself must be material? Who does not feel, that, if this were all which God required, and if with this he could be well pleased, he must have bodily senses like our own, and be but little separated from us by any difference in nature? On the contrary—if I worship God with my spirit, if I adore him with the prostration of my soul, if I offer him the homage of my heart, I confess all those properties in Deity which distinguish him from the finite: I proclaim by the very nature of the service which I render, that I own in him the perfections which constitute his glory; I declare, in short, my persuasion that "God is a Spirit," and thereby acknowledge, to the utmost of my capabilities, his greatness, his wonderfulness, his awfulness. In offering to the Creator an outward and bodily service, I go not so far as my nature enables me to go, in giving him the tribute which is due from his creature. I am something nobler than body; compounded of matter and spirit, am I not to honour God with the best, and serve him with that which approaches nearest to himself? "God," says an old divine, "granted us the jewel as well as the case, and the jewel as well as the case we must return to him." The spirit is God's gift, and must return to him who gave it; and it must return to him in our service morally, as well as return to him at last physically.

Yet, let it not be thought, that spiritual worship excludes bodily, or, that because God must be served with the soul, therefore has the body no part in the service. If body as well as soul is to be sanctified, with body as well as soul may God be adored. If body as well as soul is to be glorified, with body and with soul may God now be honoured. And, therefore, though we do not say, that the acceptablenesss of prayer can depend upon the posture of the body when that prayer is presented, we hold the connection to be so close between the soul and body, that where there is inward worship, it is almost impossible there should be outward irreverence. In prostrating herself, the soul will almost necessarily prostrate that wherein she dwells ; and however certain it be, that the spirit may be humbled whilst the knee is not bent, we are sure that the emotions of the heart affect, as it were, involuntarily the limbs ; so that he who is inwardly engaged in supplication, must put restraint on himself ere he can suppress all external manifestation of the solemn employment. We therefore plead, on the authority of the text, for the necessity of a spiritual worship, and require you to take heed that you mock not the Lord, by honouring him with that which you have in common with the brute, and withholding that which constitutes you reasonable creatures ; for the body is the Lord's, as well as the soul—his by creation, his moreover by redemption ; so that it is the whole man, whose consecration is demanded. And if the Lord your Redeemer lifted up his eyes, when his spirit was elated with thankfulness—if he fell on his face when his soul was in an agony of prayer ; if Jacob, even in the moment of dissolution, when nature was failing, and he stretched in weakness on his bed, so felt that the urgency of the spirit must have vent through the members, that he " worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff," or as it is said in Genesis, " bowing himself on the bed's head ;" oh ! then, brethren, take good heed that you never treat bodily protrastion as altogether an indifferent thing. Indifferent it is except as the index, the natural and almost the involuntary accompaniment, of prostration of the soul. Rather receive it as truth demonstrable by reason as well as experience, that though it be easy enough to give God the homage of the body, when that of the soul is denied, it is not easy to give him that of the soul unattended with that of the body. If then the limbs are composed into no reverence of posture, and the attitude is indicative of carelessness or apathy, learn to doubt at the least whether you can be such worshippers as are described in the text : " The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

What, then, is that spiritual worship, which God, as a Spirit, requires from us ? We reply, that it defines itself. It is the homage of the soul ; an act, in which all the powers of the inner man earnestly combine ; so that the understanding and the will and the affections are alike engaged in the service of the Lord. It is an act of the understanding ; so that it may not be said, as of the Samaritans, " Ye worship ye know not what." The spiritual worshipper prostrates himself before the Being, whom by the light of nature he acknowledges as Creator and Preserver ; and by the light of revelation, as the Father, the Mediator, and the Redeemer. It is an act of the will,—the soul surrendering herself to God, determined to submit herself to his pleasure, and seek in him her satisfaction. And it is an act of the affections,—the heart delighting itself in the Being addressed, and centering in him its warmest sympathies. This it is to worship God "in spirit and in truth;" engaging the understanding with all its powers of embracing truth, and the will with all its energies of choice and decision, and the affections with their fervour and tenacity in the one work of acknowledging and embracing in the Lord God Almighty, the alone object whose wrath is really terrible, and whose favour is really valuable.

And ere there can be this spiritual worship, there must be the principle of faith; inasmuch as "he who cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." When you bow yourselves down before your Maker, if it be "in spirit and in truth" that you adore him, you will be possessed with the persuasion, that you are as actually in the presence of God, as though with your eyes of flesh you beheld him on his everlasting throne, and heard with your ears the majestic melodies of his movements; and you will further have a thorough conviction that a door of access has been opened to you through the mediation of Jesus, and that the Intercessor stands by throughout the solemn audience, pleading his own merits in support of your petitions. Which faith will be combined with love, inasmuch as spiritual worship recognizes the Divine perfections, and, wherever these are discovered, they will excite a growing admiration and draw out the soul towards their possessor, as that glorious One, of whom it can say, "Whom have I in heaven, but thee? there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee." Yea, and the spiritual worshipper will have a great reverence of God; confidence will not generate familiarity. If he bow himself in full assurance, that God casteth out none that come to him through Jesus Christ, it will be equally in a trembling consciousness, that the Lord is the great God, and that his name is as fearful as glorious. "God," says an old writer, "is a Spirit, infinitely happy, and therefore we must approach him with cheerfulness. He is a Spirit of infinite majesty; and therefore must we come before him with reverence. He is a Spirit infinitely high; therefore must we offer our sacrifices with the deepest humility. He is a Spirit infinitely glorious; therefore we must in our measure contribute to his glory by having the highest aims in our worship. He is a Spirit infinitely provoked by us; therefore must we offer our worship in the name of a pacifying Mediator and Intercessor."

Such, brethren, beloved in the Lord, is spiritual worship—that worship which is grounded on the very nature of God, seeing that God is a Spirit; and which must be acceptable with God, inasmuch as it confesses his perfections, and consecrates to his service the best that we have, the noblest portion of humanity. We would intreat you all to examine yourselves, whether it be with this spiritual worship that you worship your Maker and Redeemer, either publicly in the sanctuary, or privately in the closet. It is so easy to rest on the outward form, and bring to God the mere carcase of devotion, that it cannot be an unnecessary admonition that we search diligently whether there be the required spirituality in our praises and our prayers. There is no deceiving God. God is a Spirit, and penetrates the solitude of the inner man; so that the petition of the lips cannot pass with him for prayer, seeing that he hearkens for the inaudible language of the heart; and the melodies of the voice cannot pass with him for praise, seeing that he listens for harmony swept from the invisible chords of the soul. Oh! if we would be honest in confession, how little, after all, do most of us know of this inward worship of the Almighty! Who amongst us, when he enters more immediately into the presence of the Lord, is so occupied by the feeling of the spirituality of God, that he himself becomes, as it were, all spirit, all soul—the attempting converse with an immaterial Being, seeming to etherealize the worshipper, so that the body is forgotten, or rather the whole man more assimilated to the object of his adoration?

Yet let it not be supposed, that no worship can find acceptance with God, which is interrupted by the wandering of thought, and the intrusion of worldly imaginations. Indeed, while in the flesh, we shall always be liable to have devotion thus broken and deformed; it is the infirmity of our nature, that we cannot keep the mind long intent on one thing, so that often in the midst of high and holy musings, it will start suddenly aside, and defile itself with the corrupt and the perishing. We worship God "in spirit and in truth," if, so fast as what is earthly intrudes, we labour to expel it. The bells which were between the pomegranates on the garments of the Jewish High Priest, and which caused his sound to be heard when he went into the holy place, were perhaps designed to warn the worshipper to call home every fugitive thought. So should signals be given in our souls, lest the solemnities of devotion be interrupted; and conscience should be as a watchman to strike the bell, whensoever there is a pause in the inward adoration. In our Liturgy, why do the words, "Let us pray," occur so frequently in the midst of the prayers? They are the bells upon Aaron's garments, to remind you of the solemn duty in which you are engaged. And we thank God for the assurance, that there shall come a time, when we shall be no longer oppressed by this body of death. We shall never be altogether spiritual, nor would we desire to be separated from matter, seeing that Christ has carried up his body into heaven, and sits in it at the right hand of God. But "it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body," and will not impede me by its grossness, nor detain me by its lassitude, nor tempt me by its appetites, but will be auxiliary to the soul in the occupations and enjoyments of eternity. Then, when I better understand the nature of God, shall I also be better fitted to adore and magnify him. Then, (oh, for the dawning of so blessed a scene!) when I have left far behind every earthly attainment, and approached immeasurably nearer to that Being who will yet be unapproachable, matter will be refined into such congeniality with spirit, that the outward man and the inward will alike join in every exercise of devotion—all feebleness gone, all weariness, all sinfulness: and we shall "rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty." This will be spiritual worship within the veil. Oh! if we would ever join in this—if we would be amongst that blessed throng who shall cast their crowns before the throne, and join in the new song of glory to the Lamb, we must be amongst those who worship God "in spirit and in truth" upon earth. "The Father seeketh such to worship him." Yes, they have to be sought for, as though they were but few. God grant that we may be of the number. Oh! let us give all diligence to the putting away from us formality, and coldness, and indifference, that so, delighting in God whilst we live, God may take us to himself when we die.

THE IMMOVEABLENESS OF THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JULY 8, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."—Hebrews xii. 28, 29.

OF what kingdom is it the Apostle here speaks when he speaks of Christians receiving an immoveable kingdom, "a kingdom which cannot be moved?" Many have thought that he speaks of heaven, and no doubt there is an important sense in which even now in the midst of their warfare with principalities and powers true believers receive that kingdom which they shall hereafter share with Christ. They are enabled by faith to realize, and by hope to embrace this kingdom; they have the effects of it in their own experience, and the charter of it in those many pregnant promises which God's Spirit has indited for their assurance; and it were no great stretch of language if on accounts such as these, and recalling descriptions of the inheritance as incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, we should declare of true Christians, with distinct reference to their future and heavenly portion, that they receive a kingdom which cannot be moved. But if you examine the context, you will see at once that St. Paul is setting two dispensations in opposition, representing the one as designed for convulsion and overthrow, the other as intended to remain always immoveable. His meaning seems to be that the dispensation beneath which Christians were privileged to live would never, like the Jewish dispensation to which it had succeeded, be swept away to make room for another and a more perfect. The gospel dispensation is the "kingdom which cannot be moved." It is described as a "kingdom which cannot be moved," because it is the complete development of God's design towards this earth, and not a mere herald of a fuller manifestation. You must bear this in mind as we proceed with our discourse; you are to remember that the immoveable kingdom is the gospel dispensation, a dispensation which, unlike every preceding one, is final and not designed to give place to another. And when St. Paul appeals to the reception of an immoveable kingdom as furnishing a motive to earnestness in the service of God, he is to be considered as arguing from the fixedness of the present dispensation to the duty of a reverential and filial obedience. The object, therefore, of our discourse must be to display the justness and the fairness of such reasoning; in other words, to explain how the fact that the kingdom that cannot be moved furnishes a motive to the serving God "acceptably with reverence and with godly fear." We come at once to this inquiry. We will endeavour to meet it in the first place upon general grounds; and we will then, in the second place, examine the force of that particular reason which is subjoined by St. Paul, "For our God is a consuming fire."

I. And, first then, upon general grounds. Why should the fixedness of the gospel dispensation urge us to diligence in the service of God? Suppose we take for a moment the opposite supposition, and imagine that there had been none of this fixedness in the gospel of Christ. Let us conceive ourselves placed under an imperfect and temporal economy, and see what difference would be made in our moral position. If you could throw an air of doubtfulness around the completion of revelation—if rather you could prove that there was still a portion of God's will to be made known; that we are not in possession of all that knowledge in respect of redemption which shall be communicated to man on this side of eternity, then immediately there would be engendered a feeling of restlessness and uncertainty; our minds, in place of setting themselves earnestly to the study of what was given, would waste themselves in conjecturing what was withheld. It is evident that under the Jewish dispensation there was a vast deal of this moral dissatisfaction. An absolute sickness of heart appears to have been felt by the most upright and pious at the long delay of a fuller revelation. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." It was not in the nature of things that they should settle down quietly to the observance of the law, and leave to the future the clearing up of what was mysterious and typical. The mind would inevitably search, and with painful anxiety, into the secrets of redemption, and return often baffled and overborne by the inquiry. And there was nothing blameworthy in this moral uneasiness; on the contrary, it was necessarily entailed upon them by the position which they occupied. Perhaps we can scarcely estimate the difficulties with which the pious Jew had to struggle. We survey the system under which he was placed by the light which is thrown on it from Christ's work of atonement. Unto us there is beauty, unto us there is aptitude, in every type and in every ordinance; and as we interpret the law by the gospel, defining the shadow by comparing it with the substance, the whole arrangement appears so simple and so expressive that there is no small risk of our overlooking the obscurity which must have hung around figures previously to the coming of him whom they outlined. But in estimating the position of the Jew, you must keep out of sight the advantages which, through living later in time, we have in our keeping; we must take the godly men under the law as possessing no intelligence upon points which they most longed to investigate, save that which was to be wrung from the dark shades of a system which was to be removed. It is easy to say that his business, like our own, was to obey the revealed without distracting and perplexing himself with the hidden, but the fact is, the revealed was not intelligible without some appeal or reference to the hidden.

You will not think that the pious and God-fearing Israelite could bring victims to the altar, and could go through the burdensome rites of legal expiation, without an earnest and almost painful desire to understand thoroughly the meaning of the services in which he had thus engaged. There was nothing of an unlawful curiosity—there was merely the exercise of a needful research into the prescribed ordinances of his religion; and though he might make some way, it could only be a little way in deciphering the figures and expounding the enigmas of a mystic ritual. At best, he could only see Christ Jesus afar off, and the distant contemplation could not fail to be dim and unsatisfying; and therefore we again say there must have been a moral disquietude in the mind of the righteous Jew, which was the produce of his circumstances, and not of want of faith. The more earnestly he conformed to the dispensation beneath which he lived, the more must he have perceived that this dispensation was hereafter to be shaken, and the more must he have longed to exchange the discoveries of the moveable for those of the immoveable kingdom. He could not present service, every jot of which was typical, without desiring the day when the antitype should be manifested; he could not content himself with the shedding of blood and the burning of incense, without striving to fathom the mighty secrets of propitiation and intercession, but finding himself (as in a great degree he must have found himself) defeated in his endeavours to penetrate the mysteries by which he was encompassed, it was unavoidable that restlessness and dissatisfaction should have gained possession of his mind, that he should have a most arduous task to perform, in so struggling against the desire for further intelligence, so as not to allow it to withdraw him from rigid conformity to what was already revealed. And in thus showing you the moral disquietude which must have weighed down the righteous Jew, we show you, in a degree, what our own state would become if we were not placed under a dispensation which could not be moved. If we were assured that, as yet, we were only in possession of a half revelation, of a half Bible; that the religious system which God has appointed was merely preliminary to a fuller and a clearer, with which our children should be blessed; we think it certain that there would be quickly a felt restlessness of mind, and that much of the energy which ought to be centred on the simple work of obedience would be fruitlessly expended on the effort to anticipate what was yet undisclosed. We remember, indeed, with all our present advantages there is still very much to be revealed, that we see only "through a glass darkly," though privileged to enjoy all the lustre of the gospel. But all that is kept back, has to do with the rewards of eternity, and not with the duties of time. We know all God's purposes towards this creation, so far as knowledge has a bearing upon practice; and though there are undiscovered matters into which we may desire to search, they are not of a character to put a check upon ardour in obedience from the feeling that what is yet to be revealed will introduce a vast difference into the duties required from man; so that there can be no fair argument against our assertion, that were we brought under a dispensation which can be, and is to be removed, we should be brought, like the Jew, into a posture of moral uneasiness, and thus be diverted, at least partially from the careful acting out of what we did know, by the vain and not altogether unlawful attempt of ascertaining what we did not. And if this be sound reasoning, we show you at once much power in the inference of St. Paul, that inasmuch as we receive a kingdom which cannot be moved, we should have grace to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For if we are exempt from all those causes of dissatisfaction and perplexity which are necessarily engendered by the moveableness of a dispensation, there must lie on us an additional obligation to obey unswervingly; and we shall be indisputably less excusable if we flinch from our duty or discharge it carelessly and reluctantly. There is just the difference between our condition under an immoveable kingdom, and the condition of those who were under the moveable kingdom, that there would be between a man who should be bidden to do something in the dark, and that of another man who should be told to do the same thing in the daylight. We will not say that the darkness is an apology for remissness, but that the sunshine takes away a great show of excuse. The man under the moveable dispensation was bound to active and pains-taking obedience; but then he had a hard battle to fight ere he could bring himself to act upon what he felt to be temporary, and a mighty impulse to withstand ere he could take part in mysteries of which he could not fathom the meaning. But when the daylight was poured in, and the shadow gave place to the substance, and the secret things of every figure and type were brought out and shown to the nations, then, assuredly, there was removed a great obstacle to the yielding obedience. Piety was reduced to so much simpler and more accessible a thing that condemnation will be a hundred-fold aggravated if God be not reverentially and fearfully served. Receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, there are not brought to bear on us the disturbing forces which acted within the moral orbit of the Jew. We look straightway to Christ as a sacrifice, and are not set to behold him in bulls and goats led up to the brazen altar. We can mark the Mediator, entering by his own blood into the holy of holies, and are not left to search out his intercession in that of a priest who, compassed with infirmity, needed for himself what he presented for others. We can go at once to "the fountain open for sin and uncleanness," and are not required to learn the methods of spiritual purification from the multiplied processes of ceremonial. We have been made acquainted with the abolition of death, of life and immortality being brought vividly to light, and we are not reduced to a vague hope or dim conjecture of the resurrection of matter and of its fresh inhabitation by spirit. But in these and numerous like points of distinction lies the difference between a kingdom which can be moved, and a kingdom which cannot be moved. That which cannot be moved is the substance, whilst that which can be moved is only the shadow. He, therefore, who is under the immoveable, has realities within his grasp, whilst he who is under the moveable has only figure and parable; and just in proportion that the knowing with precision what is to be hoped and what feared will make a man more decisive in action than the being left in doubt and uncertainty,—in that same proportion ought energy under the immoveable dispensation to carry it over energy under the moveable dispensation. If I feel that I am possessed of all the intelligence which is ever to be communicated, there remains nothing but that I forthwith brace myself to the pursuing a course which that intelligence prescribes. But if I feel that I have only a fraction of the information, and that those who come after me will have vastly the upper hand in knowledge, then, though it may not be said that I shall be justified on this account in slackening exertion it must certainly be allowed that there will be a greater resistance to overcome, and a stronger effort will be needed in order to my walking in my appointed career. Thus, without in the least insinuating that the subjects of the kingdom which was to be moved could stand excused for inertness and loitering, we affirm that the subjects of the kingdom which cannot be moved are infinitely more blameworthy if they are slack in obedience. The fixedness of the dispensation lays upon them an incalculably additional obligation. We cannot advance as an apology for remissness the incomplete and partial directions furnished by God. We cannot take refuge in the transitory character of the economy, and plead the insufficiency of typical teaching; we cannot shield ourselves beneath the obscurity of figures, and argue that we needed the plain-speaking of express declarations; we cannot point to tokens of decay and evanescence in the system, and urge that we are reluctant to place ourselves under an empire which seems crumbling away. The kingdom which we have received is a kingdom which cannot be moved. Does the roll of nature bring with it a shaking of its pillars? Time, which convulses everything besides, does it do aught else but corroborate the gospel? The statutes of this kingdom, are not written in hieroglyphics; the laws of its citizenship, they are not propounded in enigmas; everything wears the aspect of a final and complete revelation; the figurative has given place to the literal; prophecy has sunk into performance: who, therefore, will refuse to acknowledge that there is laid upon those who receive the immoveable kingdom a mighty weight of responsibleness over and above that which rested on the recipients of the moveable? And if the fixedness of the dispensation thus enhance the responsibleness of its subjects, we put beyond controversy that the fixedness should furnish motives to the serving God "acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Oh! if the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment and condemn by their penitence at the preaching of Jonah those who repented not at the preaching of

Christ; if the queen of the east, because she came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon, shall be a swift witness against those who listened not to a greater and wiser,—will not the individuals who struggled bravely on through the cloud and darkness of a preliminary dispensation, who found redemption under mystic emblems, and hailed a deliverer in the dim portraiture of legal type—will not these bear down with an overwhelming accusation on the men of later generations, if, despite all the advantages of their condition, the advantages of a complete revelation, of accomplished figures, of a manifested Mediator, they shall decline the moral combat to which they are summoned, and make no strenuous effort to lay hold on the salvation which is proffered through Christ?

And thus we think it satisfactorily shown that the fixedness of the gospel dispensation, entailing as it does a new weight of responsibleness, furnishes a most stirring and powerful motive to the performance of the duties of religion; so that arguing the point upon general grounds, we seem to have established all the force, and fairness, and reason of St. Paul; and to have proved that he infers most justly our obligation to serve God acceptably "with reverence and godly fear," from this very fact, that "we receive a kingdom that cannot be moved."

II. Now we propose, in the second place, to make good the same truth on the particular ground which the apostle lays down. It is evident, as we have shown you, that St. Paul argues the duty of obedience from the fixedness of the dispensation; but then he subjoins as his concluding argument—"For our God is a consuming fire." Let us see how the several arguments are associated. We cannot be wrong in arguing that until the gospel was published—until, that is, the spiritual kingdom was finally settled on an immoveable basis, there were points on which God's will was not clearly ascertained, and men might easily have formed incorrect suppositions, forasmuch as they proceeded on an imperfect knowledge. Informed of God's gracious design of providing pardon for the guilty, but not informed of the details of the arrangement, it might well come to pass that they would indulge in expectations which a fuller intelligence would have caused them to reject. They knew that God was "a consuming fire;" but they derived this knowledge from that tremendous outbreak of thunder and flame which accompanied the delivery of the law. The words indeed are quoted from Moses, for when the lawgiver recapitulated what had been done and enacted at Sinai, he added "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." But, you will, we think, allow that if the Israelites knew God as "a consuming fire," because so revealed on Mount Sinai, and if they did not as yet know thoroughly the character under which he would reveal himself on Mount Zion, it might be a matter of question with them whether the mildness of the one revelation would not so temper the fierceness of the other, that "a consuming fire" might no longer be a just description of God. They lived under a moveable dispensation; the immoveable which was to follow, came charged with discoveries of God's purposes of loving-kindness; might there not consequently have been somewhat of hesitation on their minds as to whether the fire which blazed awfully before mercy was allowed to shine out in its brightness, would be equally devouring when the day of free pardon had dawned on the creation? Assuredly, we think, that the want of fixedness in the dispensation, would thus practically abstract something of terror, and therefore something also of influence from the fact, that our God is "a consuming fire." Looking forward to the time when God was emphatically to discover himself as a pardoning God, Oh ! it would be very easy for men to entertain the thought, that he would no longer in the same degree show himself a punishing God. But so soon as the kingdom became " a kingdom which cannot be moved ;" the possible union of characters—the characters of the punishing God and the pardoning God—was established beyond the reach of a question or a doubt. It is the law of the gospel dispensation that all sin shall be forgiven, if forgiveness be sought through a Mediator, but that no sin shall be forgiven unless sprinkled through faith with the blood of a Surety. It is the appointment of this dispensation that punishment should be wrung to the very last tittle from the flesh and spirit of the offender, if he do not close with the terms on which deliverance is offered through Christ ; and forasmuch as this kingdom cannot be moved, why this law and this appointment can never be repealed, never neutralized, never modified. We cannot, unless we hoodwink our understandings, and take pains to be the victims of a lie, flatter ourselves that judgment when brought out into action will be less fiery and less tremendous than when graven on the statute book. We cannot argue, as the subjects of a moveable kingdom might have argued, that God's anger appeared dreadful because we knew only a part of his purposes, and that possibly the appearance would be softened away if we came to know all. Ours is the immoveable kingdom, and the very process by which this kingdom was set up and wrought into steadfastness and durability, witnesses with a testimony the most thrilling, and the most overpowering that it was a law with God, the least swerving from which would be the shaking of his own throne, that sin must be punished before the sinner can be pardoned. It was on Zion ten thousand-fold more than on Sinai, that the Almighty proved himself " a consuming fire." When the eternal Son in the might of the coalition of Deity and humanity went up the mountain side and laid himself down on the altar, the substitute of a lost world, and there blazed forth the fires of justice to consume the sacrifice. Oh ! then far above, and far beyond the demonstration of Sinai, wrapped in flame and smoke, was there given a proof to all intelligent creation, that the emblem of God, when he deals with the guilty, shall be ever that of " a consuming fire." Thus it was in giving fixedness to the dispensation that God manifested himself as " a consuming fire." The kingdom became immoveable through offering a sacrifice, but the sacrifice was offered amidst the blazings of God's wrath, and therefore if under the kingdom which could be moved, men might think of the anger as to be quenched or allayed, who amongst us under the kingdom which cannot be moved will ever dream of " a consuming fire" as leaving unconsumed a solitary particle which has been denounced for its burning ? The fact that the kingdom cannot be moved is an irresistible proof that the fire cannot be extinguished. Thus there is a connection, the very closest between the fixedness of the gospel dispensation and that character of God which sets him forth as the devourer of the impenitent ; and hence we gather that the argument to the " serving God acceptably," which is drawn from his being " a consuming fire," is but a particular case of the general argument derived from our " receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved." Therefore, all our former reasons on the general argument must be applicable to the particular. Futurity comes charged with no softenings away of God's wrath against sin ; this is the fact that should nerve to obedience.

How are we certified of the fact? Whence our assurance that there may not be a yearning of mercy over the reprobate, and therefore a quenching of the flames of indignation? The kingdom is an immoveable kingdom, and the very principle upon which the kingdom is based, is that God is "a consuming fire" unto all who refuse to obey. Then the kingdom being that which cannot be moved, the principle must be that which cannot be moved. Therefore if I serve not the Lord, am I not wilfully, and with mine own hand, lighting up the inextinguishable flame? I do it not in ignorance, I cannot urge that the present partial revelation may possibly be superseded by another and a more favourable. The fixedness of the dispensation takes away from me all power of excuse. If then I go on carrying it with a high hand against the Creator, I make myself to be a whole burnt-offering in that day of vengeance, when sacrifices shall be salted with fire, and thus be made victims which may for ever endure, and never exhaust, the wrath of the Lord God Almighty. Thus a motive, the very mightiest, to the acceptably serving of God "with reverence and godly fear" is fetched from the fact, that "God is a consuming fire." Still the fact appeals for its certainty to the fixedness of the gospel dispensation; so that we trust the whole force of the apostle's reasoning is now brought out, and you will appreciate the power, and understand the connection of the several parts of his argument, when he says, "We receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

We ought, perhaps, to say a word on the somewhat singular expression—"Let us have grace." It can only refer to our seeking grace, to our improving grace. When St. Peter exhorts Christians to "grow in grace," he uses language which is nearly akin to that of St. Paul. We are not to understand by either expression, that grace is aught else but the free gift of God; it does not lie at human disposal in such a way that we may acquire it or retain it without search or without carefulness; but when bidden to "grow in grace" we are to consider ourselves exhorted to use those means for obtaining and cherishing the Spirit which, revealed and instituted by God, are sure to be honoured by him and rendered effectual. Without grace it is impossible that we should serve God acceptably, for man himself is void of all capacity for performing the will of his Maker; hence the being admonished that we may have grace to serve God acceptably is the same thing as being admonished that we set not to the work in any strength of our own, but that we go to God for assistance in order that we may honour God by obedience.

And we may further observe, that the service here demanded at our hands is of a nature which marks the awfulness of God. There is to be nothing of familiarity, there is to be nothing of forgetfulness of the unmeasured distance which, even when brought nigh by the blood of his own Son, separates between God and ourselves. Therefore we are to serve "with reverence and godly fear;" and though undoubtedly the fear which a Christian entertains towards God will be filial fear rather than slavish, the fear of a son who loves rather than that of a servant who dreads, yet it is certain that in our text an apprehension of wrath is supposed to be an element of godly fear. However, therefore, we may feel ourselves delivered from wrath, however assured we may be that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," and that we ourselves are entitled to appropriate such a description, yet will the thought of God as devouring his adversaries contribute to the motives by which we nerve ourselves to his service. We have not space to show you at any length that a sense of the dreadfulness of the wrath of the Almighty will thus enter into the constitution of that "godly fear" which is required from the Christian. We can only observe, that the more we contemplate the doom of the lost, the more alive shall we be to the blessedness of being delivered from so terrible a portion. What more necessary, what even more natural, than the transition from shuddering at the fierceness of God's anger against the wicked to thankfulness for the mercy of being shielded from its outbreak. "Such would have been my lot," will the Christian say, when musing on the fate of the impenitent, "had not free grace interposed, and God of his rich loving-kindness brought me up from destruction." Thus the remembrance that our God is "a consuming fire" will give new beauty to the fact that he hath accepted us in the beloved. We shall rejoice the more in our sonship the more we discern the fearfulness of remaining amongst the aliens; so that, with every admission that godly fear is not slavish, but filial, we can have no difficulty in maintaining that the view of the Almighty as taking signal vengeance on the unrighteous is eminently adapted to foster that sentiment which we are bound to entertain as adopted into his household. Carry away with you, then, this truth—the truth that peculiar interest in God is no encouragement to the throwing aside the most awful fear of God. "Our God is a consuming fire." How rich the summit of privilege when you can say, "O God, thou art my God!" And yet when the summit is reached you must still look to the blazing burning Deity for "our God," my God, "is a consuming fire." "At first glance," says an old prelate, these two expressions, 'our God,' and 'a consuming fire,' seem to look strangely at one another, but the Holy Ghost hath excellently tempered them." He is our God—this corrects that despairing fear which would otherwise seize on us from the consideration of God as "a consuming fire." But then, he is not only "our God;" he is also "a consuming fire"—this corrects that presumptuous irreverence to which else we might be emboldened by the consideration of our interest in God as "our God." Let not then a sense of security diminish our thoughts of the dreadfulness of the Almighty. After all, if we will give heed to the warnings of St. Peter, the righteous are only "scarcely saved." There is nothing to spare, nothing over and above deliverance; they are "scarcely saved." But oh! then, if upon scriptural grounds I can feel sure of salvation, I may, and I do rejoice; but if, after all, we shall only be "scarcely saved," just a hair-breadth between me and destruction, I may indeed rejoice, but I shall "rejoice with trembling."

THE ADVANTAGES OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JULY 15, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping them there is great reward."—Psalm xix. 11.

THE Psalmist is here speaking of the statutes or commandments of God. He asserts, (for it is upon the second clause that we propose to discourse,) that in keeping God's commandments "there is great reward." We shall assume that our translators have been right in using the present tense; that David refers to a reward which is even now experienced by those who fear God and strive to keep his commandments; and the passage is thus in unison with many others in the Bible which assert the present or immediate advantageousness of piety; so that whilst the chief recompense is to be looked for in another life, in this life religion is better off, so to speak, than irreligion. Thus Solomon declares that "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" he declares also that "The way of transgressors is hard." And St. Paul asserts that "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Now, this is a very important fact. It is a great thing on the side of the Christian, which effectually turns the tables against his opponents, if it should appear that even whilst on earth he is better off than the wicked, with a richer portion, and with higher enjoyments. To hear men of the world talk of religion you might imagine that God's law forbade all enjoyments whatsoever of the pleasures and gratifications of life; that it prescribed nothing but gloom and austerity, and required from those who would save the soul that they should forego every gratification which their nature solicits. They will talk to you of piety as if it were necessarily a most morose and melancholy thing, as if it debarred men from all participation in visible good, and required men to move amid what is bright and beautiful and attractive in creation only that they might mortify the propensities which there find their counterpart objects. Because God has distinctly forbidden our finding our chief good in earthly things, because he has limited us to a moderate or temperate use of those things, therefore will men perversely misrepresent his enactments, and pretend that he has given them appetites which were not to be gratified, desires which were only to be resisted, and yet all the while had surrounded them with what those appetites crave and what those desires solicit. Whereas there is nothing prohibited by the divine law but just that indulgence to our appetites and desires which, because excessive and irregular, would from our very constitution, be visited with present disappointment and remorse, and, from the necessary character of a retributive government, with future vengeance and wrath. We suppose it capable of most thorough demonstration that the man of religion, the man who allows himself in no indulgence which religion forbids, whose appetites are never his masters, but who is temperate in all things—that this man has more actual enjoyment even of what earth can afford than the reckless slave of sense who, in the expressive language of Scripture, is given over "to work all uncleanness with greediness." There never, we believe, was a falser charge than that which would fasten upon religion such a severe code of precepts, such a stern series of sacrifices as must make its disciples do perpetual violence to their feelings, and live within the reach of pleasures in which they must deny themselves all share, whilst they who renounce religion are dividing amongst them whatever good the present life can give. Religion forbids all that is irregular and excessive in the use of earthly things; but it forbids nothing more; and whilst we are constituted as we are, whilst there is no slavery so oppressive as being the slaves of our own lusts, whilst there are the irrepressible workings within us of a great moral principle causing uneasiness and even anguish to follow upon criminal indulgence—nay, it is no boast of idle declamation, it is the statement of simple and sober calculation that the religious man, partaking only of what religion permits, enjoys in a much higher degree than the sensual worldling the very objects for which that worldling throws away his soul. So that even taking those commandments which refer to the use of the good things of earth, which put a restraint on our passions and a curb on our appetites, we shall venture to say of them, that they not only admonish us of our duty, but recompense us for its performance; and therefore the declaration of the text is in every respect brought to pass—"Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

Now we do not purpose on the present occasion engaging you with proofs of the advantageousness of a religious life as compared with an irreligious. We have already said that the testimony of Scripture is expressive on that point, and your own minds will readily suggest proofs in support of that testimony. But it is occasionally a good way of treating a text to bring it into contrast with some other text which appears to contradict it, and apply our time to reconciling the two. And though, as we have observed, the general tenor of the Bible is decidedly on the side of the opinion that the religious man is better off than the irreligious, whilst he lives as well as when he dies, there is one strong passage which would seem to deliver a contrary sentiment: this is found in the 15th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, that chapter in which is carried on a sublime argument in respect of the resurrection of the dead. Addressing himself to professing Christians, and therefore employing the reasoning peculiar to Christianity, St. Paul makes his whole appeal to the resurrection of Jesus, and therefore represents the fact of the resurrection of the members as standing or falling with the fact of the resurrection of the Head. You all understand this reasoning. It is not that there would be no future life were there no resurrection, but if there were no resurrection then Christ is not raised, and if Christ be not raised human nature is unredeemed, and if human nature be unredeemed there still rests upon body and soul the fierce curse of the displeasure of God. So that by taking away the resurrection you would take away every hope with which the future is now hung to the Christian. You might profess to leave undisturbed the spiritual achievements of the Redeemer, and still dwell on the deliverance wrought out for the souls of the fallen; the matter of fact would be that you would reduce redemption to an absolute nonentity, and that by darkening the grave you would so darken eternity that in this life only could we hope in Christ. And here comes in that strong saying of the Apostle on which we desire to fix your attention. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

Now, we have shown you that the having hope in Christ only in this life, would be the result of there being no resurrection; we may take it therefore as the statement of St. Paul, that if there were no resurrection, Christians would be "of all men most miserable." And what are we to say to this? What then becomes of our text? Where then is the great reward, the great present reward, in keeping God's commandments? There might be a reward hereafter; how could there be one now? Certainly, this is a statement which wears a strange appearance. The Apostle seems, so far as the present life is concerned, to give an overwhelming verdict in favour of ungodliness as contrasted with godliness. If it be true that by taking from them the hopes which are bound up with the resurrection, you would reduce Christians to a state of greater misery than that occupied by any others upon the earth, then wickedness would appear to possess a vast advantage over righteousness in the present scene of being, and there is no superiority for the servants of God until they shall have entered the invisible world. Scripture and experience are, as we have said, alike against this conclusion. If an uninspired writer had affirmed that the most miserable being in creation would be a Christian supposing him without hopes for the future, there would have been uttered on all hands a vehement contradiction; the disciples of Christ would have pressed eagerly forwards attesting the possession of such a measure of gladness and peace that if deceived for hereafter, the advantage was on the side of the deception. And we cannot for a moment entertain the thought that there is less of present happiness in the portion of the believer than in that of the unbeliever. On the contrary, we are thoroughly persuaded that even if there were no future world with its untold bliss, the man of piety and prayer would pass through life with a greater share of enjoyment than the slave of lust or the votary of dissipation. We always regard zeal for the propagation of infidelity as one of the most monstrous passions which can disgrace human nature. We consider that if it should be proved at last that Christianity is false, that heaven and hell have been the creations of enthusiasts, there is so much of comfort, so much of innocent delight derived from the Bible by all who take it for God's Word, that the attempt to disseminate scepticism is worthy of nothing but a fiend, and the man who devotes himself to this endeavour, even if he have truth on his side, should be driven out by acclamation as the pest of society, as the man who would strip his fellowmen of a consolatory, harmless persuasion, and give them nothing in exchange but the darkest and most desolate creed. There would be an immeasurably greater mass of misery in the world if you could extirpate Christianity, even in those influences whose whole bearing is on present concerns. It is impossible, for example, to descend into the cottages of our peasantry, and to contrast the progress through life of the God-fearing labourer with that of the reckless and dissolute, without feeling that religion has a vast present advantage over irreligion; and that no fouler assassin could force his way to the fireside of the poor pious man than the agent of infidelity, even were it a matter of fact that Christianity was "a cunningly devised fable," and the whole theory of redemption the invention of a time serving priesthood. What we now wish is to make St. Paul's assertion square with these allowed and ascertained facts. If it be true that Christians would be "of all men most miserable" on the supposition of there being no resurrection, is it not certain that the whole benefit of Christianity is prospective, and that whatever may take place in the future, for the present the unrighteous is the happier? We cannot see how, if it be the hope of another life which alone keeps Christians from being miserable—we cannot see how the balance of happiness here can fail to be on the side of the ungodly. Come, then, here is an important discrepancy in Scripture to adjust. What are we to say of the apparent contradiction? How in the face of St. Paul's assertion, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable"—how, I say, are we prepared to uphold what David in our text has alleged of the commandments of God, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward?"

Now, you must consider St. Paul as supposing a case, and we must ascertain his supposition before we can draw his conclusion. We will first show you what his supposition is not, and then what his supposition is. I take a God-fearing man who has carried with him to his death bed his faith in

Christianity; he has spent many years in obedience to the precepts of the gospel, and when he comes to die his pillow is smoothed by its promises; he departs hence in the full persuasion of a resurrection; and even when the spirit has fled there is a sunnyness on the cheek which tells of the direction of his last thoughts; and I want to know whether, after all, if Christianity be a fable, so that the man has died under a delusion—I want to know whether any one of you is ready to write "most miserable" on his gravestone, just because he lived a believer, when he would have come to the same thing at last if he had lived an unbeliever? There is not one of you who would dare do this; there is not one of you who, after witnessing the sustainment which the man had in his religion, would not confess that if he died in a mistake it was an advantageous mistake, and that it were better to be a Christian than an infidel even if Christianity be altogether false. This, then, cannot be the case which the Apostle supposes. He does not suppose a man living and dying a Christian, and not finding out his error till launched into eternity. Such a man would not be most miserable; such a man would have enjoyed more real happiness than he could have obtained in any other course, and of this man it is not true that because there is no resurrection, because in this life only he has been profited by his religion, therefore he is to be accounted amongst the most wretched of the earth.

Now, take another supposition. We will suppose a converted and renewed man who has gone through the painful discipline of a great spiritual change, and who is pressing on with ardour towards heaven; we will suppose this man informed suddenly and irresistibly that there is no resurrection, that therefore in this life only can he have hope in Christ. We consider you have here just the case which the apostle imagined, and we can go unreservedly with the decision that such a man would be most miserable. It seems clear that the Apostle alludes to no other case, for no other will meet the description of having hope in Christ but this hope limited to the present; and on this supposition there will be little difficulty in showing that the epithet "most miserable" would be thoroughly applicable, so that the wicked man would literally have an advantage over the righteous, if the righteous be deceived and find out the deception. For in general, the hardest thing to bear is a sudden reverse, and there is no more pitiable object on the earth than the individual who, by unlooked for events, is transferred from a proud elevation to some deep pit of calamity; there will be a frightfulness in the contrast which will do more to unman the best set spirit than the actual amount of disaster; and he who could have borne up against misery had he never known happiness will be overcome by the transition, and suffer by comparison as much as by infliction. And if this be a true statement, where is the language which shall describe the wretchedness of the man who, having believed Christianity and received it into his heart, is taught on some witness which it is impossible to resist, that there is no resurrection, and therefore no redemption? The man has embarked himself, so to speak, in Christianity; he has centred his hopes, his fears, his desires, he has staked his everything on the truth, and having surmounted a thousand obstacles, and made his way through a thousand foes, and offered his own body on the altar of the living God, he is pressing on with rejoicing and elevated spirit, looking for the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" and we send you to meet him in the midst of this his lofty career, and we arm you with irresistible proof that there shall be no resurrection, and we commission you to show him with a power of evidence from which there is no escape, that there is no hope in Christ for an after state of being: what then? When this dark message should have forced its way into his heart, do you think there would move on the broad surface of this earth a more miserable creature than he who just before had been hoping exultingly and singing triumphantly? It were nothing to prove to the lukewarm professor that there should be no resurrection: he has never known the ecstacies of piety, and therefore he feels not the appalling declaration. But you have come down upon a man whose whole soul was in his religion, who upheld himself in every trial by the consolation which he drew from the future, and who found a refuge from every grief and a deep fountain to cleanse, in the conviction that Christ had abolished death and opened an eternal kingdom to his followers. What then have you done but forced him to experience a most violent transition, a transition from holding the title deeds of a celestial and everlasting inheritance to the knowing himself consigned to the woe and the shame of the reprobate? What but dragged him from an eminence whence he looked forth on the glorious prospect of an eternity all his own, and forced him to fix his sight on wretched fiends which seem to people the future and claim him as their prisoner? These are but slight terms with which to characterize the change of prospect if it could be proved to an ardent believer that there was no resurrection, that Christ had wrought nothing on his behalf which should avail for him in eternity. If, then, transition enhance disaster, if the wretched be more wretched in proportion as much to the height from which they fell as to the depth to which they sank, then it must be the extreme point of misery at which a righteous man would be placed who, having taken up Christianity as a charter of the future, should find it altogether limited to the present; and we can contend for it therefore as a literal truth that by bringing home to the true Christian a proof that there is no resurrection, you would instantly make him "of all men the most miserable." But, nevertheless, since you can find no such proof—since it remains irrefragable that "now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep," there is nothing in that saying of St. Paul to invalidate this saying of the Psalmist, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward."

But we may yet more definitely exhibit the misery and prove the greatness of the wretchedness on the supposition which we assume to be that of St. Paul. We are contending, you observe, that the only man to whom the Apostle's description "most miserable" can apply, is one who, having embraced Christianity as full of the material of hope for the next life, is led to ascertain that its hopes are confined to the present life. We have shown you of such a man that he must endure in an extraordinary degree the anguish of contrast. We go on to assert that he can have no enjoyments whatsoever, and that he would therefore be infinitely worse off than if he had never been converted. We say, he would have absolutely no enjoyments whatsoever, neither the enjoyments of religion nor the enjoyments, if such they can be called, of irreligion. As to the enjoyments of religion, we admit, rather we glory in the fact, that there is a present comfort in religion which would be poorly exchanged for the most coveted of earthly possessions. Who would barter the peace and gladness of spirit which the righteous derive from communings with God for the sparkling and beautiful things which may fall to the lot of the worldling? But whilst we maintain that there are present enjoyments in religion which vastly more than counterpoise the disquietude which it may cause, we are certain that if Christian hope were suddenly bounded by the horizon of time, then all this present enjoyment would be virtually destroyed. Each present enjoyment in religion anticipates the future. If you analyze Christian peace and Christian gladness you will find the element of another world enter largely into their constitution. Is there a present joy to the believer of which hope is not a constituent part, and which would not cease if hope were turned away or circumscribed by life? What delight is there in whole catalogue of Christian privileges from which you would not draw out the richness if you abstracted whatever is associated with a resurrection of immortality? What would you leave the believer if you intercepted those flashings from the far off country which struggle through the mist and cloud of this region of eclipse, and shed lustre round the path by which he toils on to glory? You may say that in shutting out the future we still leave the present, but the present is the foretaste of the future. In cutting off the streams you destroy the fountain. There is a pleasure in mastering an evil passion, yea, a pleasure far outdoing that derived from its gratification; but then the pleasure lies in the sense of God's approval, in the consciousness that the battle is preliminary to the crown. There is a gladness—the mirth of the world has nothing like it—the revelry of sense can afford no parallel—there is a gladness, a deep, rich gladness with the follower of Christ when in the midst of his strivings with corruption, and his resistance to Satan, he hears the whispered words of the Omnipotent, "Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God." But if it were announced to him that after fighting through life he would be vanquished in death, that Christ had indeed procured such assistances that he might wrestle with each, but certainly not such as would carry him forwards to a victor's portion, what is left him of the gladness? What satisfaction is there in knowing that God is just enabling him to purify his soul and thus to make it a thousand-fold more sensitive to the darts of the tormentor? What comfort from feeling that he is strengthened in keeping under his body, if when subjugated and crucified, it must be given up to everlasting destruction? We do indeed leave him some present enjoyments, but they have all ceased to be enjoyments. You leave him the enjoyment of growing holier, but is it no enjoyment to feel one's self fitter for heaven, if all the while the sentence is irreversible which condemns me to hell. You leave the enjoyment of communion with God, but it is no enjoyment to be admitted to temporary intercourse, and thus to learn more of the terrors, whilst I cannot diminish the certainty of everlasting exile. The enjoyment of lofty soarings when the soul springs into eternity, the enjoyment of gazing on the New Jerusalem, the enjoyment of mingling with angelic troops, and telling the splendid company that, with as firm a step and as noble powers, we ourselves ere long shall enact the high biddings of our God—where are these enjoyments? Which of them survives the announcement that there is no resurrection? Which of them lives and breathes after the discovery that in this life only we have hope in Christ? And if it make misery to be stripped of the material of happiness, to be spoiled of all that we have cherished, adrift, bankrupt, and beggared, and that too of an eternity, then come near—ye children of human wretchedness, come in penury, scorn, and sickness, widowed and orphaned, we have one who leaves you far behind in woe and in disaster; whilst we commiserate you as miserable, and describe you as miserable, we claim the epithet "most miserable" for him alone who, having become Christ's soldier under the persuasion that Christ had overcome death, afterwards ascertained that there is no resurrection. Yes, "most miserable." You may indeed say that though the enjoyments of religion are withdrawn from the supposed individual; he may still turn himself to the enjoyments of irreligion, and thus at least be no more miserable than the sensual and the worldling. The whole field of carnal pleasures and delights would be open to him, and having detected the worthlessness of piety, he might join himself to the ambitious, or herd with the voluptuous. But there is a fallacy in this reasoning which may easily be detected. The individual in question is by supposition regenerated and renewed; he has been subjected to those operations of grace by which a change is effected in the desires and affections; he has been made a true Christian, though he has been mistaken as to the extent of the mercies of Christianity; and now when you have taken from him the enjoyments of the spiritual man, it behoves you to remember that he does not possess any relish for the enjoyments of the natural; he is so far transformed by the power of God's Spirit that he cannot find the pleasures which the unconverted find in the gathering of wealth, or in the meetings of revelry, or in the climbings to eminence; and if, therefore, disappointed of eternity, he fall back on the enjoyments of sense, why he wants the very appetite for the food by which he is to be sustained; and if he persist in partaking, he can know nothing of that keen zest which others experience whose nature is unrenewed. We deny not that, as though in desperation, he might cast himself into the throng with the debauched, or gloat with the miser upon gold, or strive with the courtier for distinction; but it is impossible he should draw from licentiousness or from wealth, or from honour even that scanty portion of spurious satisfaction which might have been derived had he never been born again of God's Spirit. He cannot be again put into the position of the natural man, and he can never, therefore, enter into the feelings and pursuits of the natural man. In the place of yielding, he must do a kind of violence to himself if he give the reins to lust, and obey without resistance the law of sin in his members. He has already passed through one resurrection, the resurrection from the grave of trespasses and sins; and now when we bear down upon him with the fact that there is no other resurrection, he cannot make void that resurrection of which he has been the subject; he can at last only snatch back his grave clothes, and, attiring himself in the apparel of death, contradict by his restlessness and anxiety the assumed appearance. He may do all the actions of the natural man; he must still retain a share of the consciousness of the spiritual man. And what then will he be when, in spite of the struggles of his soul, he surrenders himself to the slavery of sense, and joins the throng of the proud and the debauched—what will he be but just the living one wandering through the sepulchres, the quickened creature going back to the tombs, and seeking companionship with the dead. O! if it were a supposable thing that the believer in Christ should find out that the future was not irradiated by the promises of the gospel, then it would be only mocking him to tell him that the whole course of earthly enjoyments stood open to him, that he might share with his fellow men all the pleasures of the present; the memory of better days and better things would haunt him in his every hour of carnal indulgence; he could not succeed in burying the dead hope of a resurrection; it would flit about him like a spectre, and force the tear and extort the groan, whilst he toiled for ease and laboured desperately to be happy; so that his condition would be that of a being striving to relish one thing whilst his appetite craves another; feeding on what he has learned to loathe; embracing what he has repulsed; making friendship where there is no congeniality; filling the void of the heart with its antipathies, whilst there is ever present, like a pale reproachful phantom, the thought of an illustrious destiny which he once believed to be his own, and this, if for a moment he persuade himself that he is happy, passes across his vision and recalls him to wretchedness. Who, then, shall rival the Christian in misery if, after setting out in the expectation of a blessed immortality he discover that only in this life is there hope in Christ? He loses, as we have shown you, the enjoyments of religion; he cannot relish the enjoyments of irreligion; he remains, therefore, literally without any enjoyment at all; stripped of the acquired, unfitted for the natural; knowing himself to be doomed to be an outcast hereafter, and unable to cheat himself with forgetfulness here. And this is misery, misery at its summit; and you may search through the annals of sorrow, and bring forward instances of overwhelming distress, but the designation "most miserable" shall belong in strictness to him whose misery lies in ascertaining that to this life is confined his hope in Christ Jesus. Since, however, the supposition can never be made good, that there is no resurrection—since, search where you will, you can gain no evidence that the believer is trusting to a "cunningly devised fable." O! it is nothing against the truth of our text that St. Paul applies the epithet "most miserable" to Christians if Christ had not opened to them eternity. Christ has opened to them eternity, and therefore we can still confiently say with the Psalmist of the commandments of God, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping them there is great reward."

Now, our object has been to prove to you that there is nothing in the quoted words of St. Paul, which militates against the fact alleged in our text and in other parts of Scripture, that in respect of present happiness—happiness during this life, the godly have an advantage over the ungodly. If, when we reached the next world we should find out that interest in Christ avails nothing for eternity, it would have been for our profit that we had lived and died Christians; the sum total of enjoyed happiness would have been greater than on any other supposition. All that St. Paul means, is, that if whilst still in the flesh, and in the midst, as they think, of a heavenward career, it could be proved to believers that there is no resurrection, then, indeed, so great would be the reverse, so intense the wretchedness, that "most miserable" would be their description as distinguished from all other men; and forasmuch as the supposition of there being no resurrection can never be established, the conclusion can never be established that the balance of present happiness is on the side of the unrighteous. If then you value your peace here, and if you would secure yourselves blessedness hereafter, you are equally bound to surrender yourselves to the service of Christ. We address you all as beings whose nature craves happiness, and we tell you that the craving can be satisfied by nothing but the comforts of religion. If it be true that we should be of all men "most miserable," if, in this life only we had hope in Christ, then, having hope in the next life as well as in this, we are bold to proclaim ourselves of all men the happiest. O! fatal and outrageous mistake, when a man defers repentance awhile in order that he may defer awhile the curtailing, as he thinks, of all his enjoyments! He knows not what he loses, in losing for an hour the sense that God has justified him freely through the death of his Son. If he be spared to repent, if he be not overtaken —for "hell," says the proverb, "is paved with good intentions"—if he be not overtaken before he reach a place of safety, his bitterest reproach will be that year after year he fed on ashes and built on sand, when the fruits of Paradise were within reach, and the Rock of Ages might have been his support. Would that we could persuade you all of this; but, alas, though millions have bought the experience, and paid for it with tears, and registered it on their graves, those who come after persist in buying for themselves, and will take no proof which is not written in their own anguish. Would that we could persuade you, persuade the thoughtless "to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to return unto the Lord our God." O what pathos there is in the entreaty of the prophet, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" "Why will ye die?" Is it pleasant? Pleasant! The fire, the rack, the scourge, the chain! Is it unavoidable? Unavoidable! what, when Jesus died for you, and the Spirit is offered to you, and God waiteth to be gracious! O, not unavoidable! "Whosoever will, let him come and drink of the water of life freely." "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" for there is nothing worth having before you. Turn, and you shall have for your portion a peace that passeth all understanding—a hope that is full of immortality!

GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT IN THIS LIFE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, JULY 22, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."—Psalm ~~lxxxiii. 36—28~~.
> lxxviii. 36-38

THESE words relate, as you must be aware, to the Israelites and to God's dealings with them when they had settled in Canaan. The whole Book of Judges may be said to be a commentary on these words, for it is a record of successive instances of idolatry and wickedness into which the people fell, of Divine judgments which in consequence overtook them, of partial and temporary repentance produced by those judgments, and of relapses into sin when the judgments were withdrawn. The people are said, in our text, to have "flattered God with their mouth" and "lied unto him with their tongues." There was no sincerity in their repentance, for "their heart was not right with him." And, nevertheless, the repentance, hollow and transient as it was, had its effect. Moved by their distress and their cry, God "many a time turned his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."

The Book of Judges is, as we have said, made up of illustrations of this. You have first an apostacy, the people being seduced into the worship of false gods. Then comes chastisement; God gives up the people to the being oppressed by some one of the nations whom he had left as thorns in their side:—"They that hate them are suffered to rule over them." Then comes the appearance at least of contrition and amendment; the smitten people turn in anguish to the Lord, put from them their idols, and cry bitterly for deliverance. And God hears the cry, though it is wrung from them solely by the extremity of their distress. He graciously raises up judges or leaders for their deliverance; Gideon, and Jephthah, and Samson appear on the scene, animated by a spirit from above; and there follows a great slaughter of the oppressors, and the yoke is taken from the neck of the Israelites. This, we say, is virtually the history which is constantly recurring throughout the Book of Judges. After the death of each deliverer, the people relapse into the forsaken idolatry; chastisement is again provoked by rebellion against God, and once more it is averted or mitigated by a repentance whose hollowness is shown so soon as there is opportunity for fresh national apostacy.

Now this is in every way remarkable. There is no disputing the fact which gives accuracy to the text, that God was moved by a repentance which had not in it even the elements of godly sorrow for sin, which could not even by a casual observer, much less by Him who searches the heart, have been mistaken for that penitence which supposes an inward and radical change. And, nevertheless, even such a repentance as this sufficed to procure a recompense at the hands of God. Though the sackcloth was on the body and not on the soul; though it was the punishment of the sin and, not the sin itself, which led to this outward humiliation, God did not turn away from the forced supplication, but vouchsafed the deliverance which was sought at his hands. Yes, God who never expresses greater abhorrence of any character than of that of the hypocrite; God, who rejects nothing more indignantly than outward homage when it is not the index of inward prostration—God may be said to have removed the humiliation of the people as though he could not read their hearts, or as though, having read them, and noted their unsubdued rebellion, he still thought the apparent contrition deserving of some recompense. You have here, as we think, an exemplification of a principle in the moral government of God which is quite distinct from that of his readiness to pardon the sin of such as truly repent. Let us confine ourselves to the endeavouring to bring out, illustrate, and vindicate this principle; in other words, let it be our business thoughout this discourse to examine and draw lessons from the fact, that though, in the words of the text, the Israelites did but "flatter God with their mouth, and lied unto him with their tongues," yet "many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."

Now, our first endeavour must be at the showing you that so far as the Israelites themselves were concerned, there is nothing in this dealing of God which is inconsistent with his character and government. We admit to the fullest extent that the people did but feignedly abandon the service of idols; that the inflicted punishment, unaccompanied with any real hatred of idolatry, alone caused them to turn to Jehovah and profess themselves his servants. And we admit yet further, that in this constrained submission there could be nothing of that acceptableness in God's sight which there avowedly is in the grief and humility of genuine repentance. Yet we may believe, I say, that there was a kind of goodness even in this humiliation of the Israelites, and that therefore we have no ground to suppose that it was wholly unrecompensed by God. Say what you will of the hypocrisy of the people, at least you must admit that they acknowledged by their conduct that their sins had brought upon them a terrible retribution. They might have treated the one true God with insolence and unbelief; refusing to acknowledge his hand in the judgments by which they had been overtaken. You would have felt no wonder if, hardened by that most debasing thing idolatry, they had defied the God of their fathers; you would, perhaps, have thought it of a piece with other parts of their conduct; you must at least have allowed that it was more to be expected than what they actually did. So that it may readily be admitted that the Israelites, contrary to what might have been looked for, recognized the supremacy of Jehovah in the great moral fact, that he, and he alone, dealeth out punishment to the sinful. We may, then, well bid you contemplate the terror and anguish of those before whose troubled gaze pass the attributes of their Creator, and who cannot shut out the conviction that these attributes are engaged for their destruction. I know that they had no love of God, but it is evident that they had a great dread of God; I know that they cared for nothing but the consequences of their sins, but it is evident that they connected those consequences with the anger of God. And this was something. There was wrung from the Israelites, in spite of their actual impenitence, as strong a confession as ever found utterance, that it is God who taketh vengeance, and that though idols may be set up and honoured and worshipped, the whole power of the universe is in the hands of a Being who "hateth iniquity," and who wields the sovereignty on purpose that he may reward every man "according to his works." And this, we say, was something. If not spiritually excellent, and therefore not likely to have been recompensed with spiritual blessings, the humiliation of the Israelites had a natural or moral excellence; and, though it could do nothing towards securing a reward hereafter, it might do something, like the humiliation of the Ninevites, towards procuring a respite from a threatened visitation. We have no right to suppose that the Ninevites when preached to by Jonah, any more than the Israelites referred to in the text, repented in such a sense that they finally separated themselves from idols and joined themselves to the worship of the one true God. But they recognized in a very striking manner the supremacy of that Being who had rescued Jonah from the deep, and sent him among them with a prediction of woe; and, though their cry may have been wrung from them by the fear of punishment, yet was that cry as fine a witness as ever went up from this sinful creation to the awfulness and resistlessness of its Maker. And, seeing that we live beneath a retributive economy, we might almost affirm it a maxim in the Divine dealings with men, that they leave nothing of good without reward and recompense from God. The Ninevites, if not won from their superstition, had acknowledged the power and shrunk from the terribleness of the Almighty; and by demonstrating that the judgments of God may be averted by penitence, they showed that the threatenings of God are conditional, and magnified that love which is always loth to strike. And this confession of his love as well as power was acceptable in the sight of God. There had not been gained by the humiliation the permanent favour of God, for, though the nation had been startled by the preaching of Jonah, it had not been brought to that thorough moral change which would have caused the abandonment of its vices, and the forsaking of its idols; but the humiliation, inasmuch as it was a confession of the properties of God, of his right to the services, and of his absolute control over the persons, of his creatures, gained a temporal return for that Being who will not even in appearance remain any man's debtor; and therefore was vengeance delayed, and Nineveh allowed to "sit" yet awhile a "queen among the nations." And thus also it was with the Israelites. Whatever might have been the case with individuals, so far as the nation was concerned there was no bending of the heart, nothing of that consciousness of sin as committed against God's righteous attributes which is a necessary element in real contrition. They only required, as facts too well proved, that if the inflicted punishment were removed that they would again show their devotedness to idolatry. But, nevertheless, by humbling themselves as they did, they publicly and solemnly declared themselves at the disposal of a Being whom they had long insulted and despised, and virtually echoed the departing words of their lawgiver—"There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun." Ay, and they may have reared temples to Baal, and joined in the celebration of rites on account of which their fathers had purged the land with sword and with fire, but, as they "went softly" like stricken and terrified men, they read as impressive a recognition of their errors, and as full a vindication of the supremacy of Jehovah, as if with their own hands they had torn down the altars of the idols and scattered the priesthood who ministered thereat. And, having wrung from the Israelites this acknowledgment of his attributes, we feel no marvel that God put a difference between Israel crying to him for deliverance, and Israel thinking only of idols; we cannot wonder that temporal calamities were removed in return for a humiliation which gave so much honour to his name; we cannot think it strange that though the people "did but flatter him their mouth, and lie unto him with their tongues," yet "many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."

But, now, if we have rightly explained why God accepted and rewarded the forced and transient humiliation of the Israelites, we have opened to you a principle of very wide application, though itmay not always obtain its due share of attention. We have spoken to you of something which is naturally excellent or acceptable in the outward conduct of the people of the world, and we have supposed it recompensed by God with a certain measure of temporal good. Whilst fully admitting that the Israelites were not sincerely penitent, and therefore certain not to obtain an eternal recompense from God, we contend that their external humiliation gave glory to God, and therefore might be attended with temporal advantage. But this assumes that God does sometimes bestow temporal rewards upon those who in any respect do him honour by executing his will, although they may not be of the number of his people, and therefore cannot expect any recompense hereafter. And this is a principle in the Divine dealings which we are very anxious to exhibit, because it is frequently overlooked, and because if fully stated and understood it may be profitable for warning and instruction. You will remember that our Lord when denouncing the hypocrisy of those who prayed and gave alms that they might be seen of men, says, "Verily, they have their reward." There seems in this something more than a declaration that what they were in search of was the praise of men; it is rather a declaration that it was this praise on which they had fixed their desires, and that God permitted them to gain it, because outwardly, at least, they did him reverence. It is the fixed end and decree of God's government to reward every man according to his works, and therefore may he award temporary advantages to those who yield him some temporary obedience. To those who give him their hearts he is graciously pleased to award a share in the glories of his heavenly kingdom; while to those who refuse him their hearts, but who, nevertheless, like the Israelites of old, walk in some measure conformably to his commands, even this shall not pass unrewarded; for he who has all things at his disposal, things in this life as well as things in the next life, will either bestow temporal good or avert temporal evil, and thus leave no room for a suspicion that any service which has been done him has been left unrequited. It is in this way that we have to speak of much that is morally excellent, though there is nothing about it of spiritual excellence, and nothing therefore which can obtain spiritual blessings. The apostle speaks of things that are lovely and "things that are of good report," as though even the natural man may produce much that is morally beautiful and morally beneficial. It is unquestionable, and I know of nothing in Christianity which requires us to withhold our acknowledgment of the fact, that there is a loveliness and worth in those natural virtues which often shine on the earth with so conspicuous a lustre. We say of that patriotism of that generosity, of that fixedness of purpose for some good end, which often distinguishes those who are strangers to natural religion, we say of them, that though not the fruits of God's Spirit and therefore not connected with spiritual blessings, they are, nevertheless, mementos of what man was ere he fell, and as productive of good to the world in which we live as though they had a better origin. And the question is, whether God have no more gifts to bestow upon those who are morally excellent than upon those who are the reverse, upon those who are the benefactors than upon those who are the scourges of mankind. It is a taunt often thrown out against the preachers of the gospel, that, by denying that there is any worth in natural excellences of character, we confound the distinctions between right and wrong, and represent our Maker as dealing in the same manner with the just and with the unjust; and, in fact, destroy his character as an impartial Moral Governor. And it is a common mode of repelling this taunt to say, that there may be as much hatred of God in the generous and honourable man as in the most thorough reprobate; and that, therefore, it is quite consistent with equity that there should go forth against both the same sentence of banishment. But this still leaves it true that men may do much that is commanded by God, perform many duties, make many sacrifices, and nevertheless receive no recompense from their Maker, though his retributive government is affirmed to extend itself to the minutest particulars. We go, therefore, to such an instance as that of the Israelites putting away their idols and serving God outwardly, though all the while "their heart was not right with him," and they "did but flatter him with their mouth." From such an instance we deduce the principle that the Almighty rewards with temporal good such actions as have in them any moral worth, though the men who perform them are his enemies all the while, and have therefore no interest in that eternal joy which he reserves for his friends. If the Israelites were benefited by their humiliation, though there was nothing in it that was spiritually excellent, why should we not believe that God bestows rewards upon any who signalise themselves as the ornaments and the benefactors of a community? Is it nothing that the patriotic, the elevators of their country and of mankind, have their names enshrined on the brightest pages of history—that succeeding ages hallow their names and hold them up as models? If it were announced as a reward to the humble and affectionate female who anointed the Saviour with spikenard that wheresoever the gospel should be preached there should her deed be told, is it no recompense to those who lavish everything for the service of their fellow-men that they earn for themselves an imperishable renown and bequeath their fame as a rich legacy to their children? "Verily, I say unto you they have their reward." If you examine the case of men of great kindliness of disposition and of active philanthropy who are yet strangers to the power of religion, do you not generally find that such men command a larger share of public esteem and run a career of almost uniform prosperity, as though by their amiable qualities they attracted to them all that this world had to give, while the want of real piety secured them against the troubles which commonly enter into the lot of the righteous? Certainly, I should say that he leads, to all appearance, the most enviable life, and has most of the comforts which can be enjoyed by fallen creatures, who is most rigidly moral without being religious. There will be exceptions, to every such rule, but we are justified in saying that the man who performs moral duties on moral principles will generally be found to be what is termed the favourite of fortune. The greatest share of public approbation and the most desirable portion in this world certainly appear to be reserved for those who are signal in the duties and warm in the charities of life. And if this be true, how are we to explain it but by declaring that God is not unmindful of the least thing which may seem to be done in obedience to his will, and that since the men who are merely earnest in curbing their passions and zealous in benefiting others are to have no future recompense, he resolves to reward them with a large measure of temporal good and thus to allow nothing to be overlooked by his retributive government. Just as there are actions which God punishes so are there also actions which God rewards in this life; and the reward will be more conspicuous because the man who receives it is not one who will be accepted at the judgment. And, O! it is a thought which should mightily check all murmuring at the superior prosperity of such as profess not to be actuated by the love of God and of Christ, that their exemption from evil and their abundance of good may be nothing but the temporal recompense of what appears to be praiseworthy in their character and conduct, as though, like the rich man in the parable, they were having their "good things" in this life, that there might be full scope in the next for the severities of a righteous retribution. In place of their superior prosperity being any evidence of the superior favour of God, it may be nothing but a demonstration of the rigid impartiality of his moral government, a government in which not even natural goodness is without its appropriate retribution, and thus may it be nothing but a token that when the day comes for the apportioning everlasting recompenses the want of spiritual goodness will be visited with the strictest punishment. And when we see a man escaping to all appearance the consequences of his sins, let us not hastily conclude that God has taken no note, or designs no punishment, of these offences. You know not how much this man may have suffered of the agony of remorse, though he may not have experienced any temporal calamity; and, after all, God may only, as in the case of the Israelites, have taken off the chains of the Ammonites, to let loose afterwards the Moabites or the Philistines. So that we have here an illustration of the working of God's system of righteous retribution; a system which has its rewards for the vigour of heroism, for the disinterestedness of patriotism, for the overflowings of generosity, as well as for Christian graces and Christian achievements; a system which no more passes by the dread which acknowledges the awfulness of God, or the remorse which confesses that his laws have been broken, than it passes by the filial sorrow of the humble penitent or the intrepidity of the stedfast disciple. And if you demand from us the reasons why God makes the virtues of the generous and honourable as well as the graces of the Christian, the results of moral dispositions as well as the effects of the operations of God's Spirit, the subject of his retributive government, and thus cuts off all occasion of complaint from those who might otherwise urge that what was excellent passed unrequited, we point you to the spectacle of the Israelites as they put away their strange gods and served the Lord, though, as the Psalmist especially declares—"They did but flatter him with their mouth, and lie unto him with their tongues;" and we bid you observe the reward which they thus obtained from the Creator and Governor of men —"Many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."

Now we are very anxious that the view of the Divine government which we have thus set before you should obtain the attention which it seems to us to deserve. It is a view which is perhaps seldom dwelt upon by Christians, who are consequently often involved in perplexities which would be avoided were they more consistent with it. The Divine government is thus exhibited as in the largest sense retributive, so that either in this life or in the next every action has its recompense, nothing which men do of good, missing its reward and nothing which they do of evil escaping its punishment. There is too common a habit of looking altogether to the future as the season of retribution, just as if in the present state of being there were no distribution of good and evil consequent on forms and varieties of character. And undoubtedly if you did not admit that there is already and actually in operation a strictly retributive system, you would have to admit that the virtues which men exhibit and practice in their natural state go literally for nothing, that they are not regarded by God with any more favour than the vices to which they are opposed. This is a dangerous principle. There is a real difference between virtue and vice. There must be a real difference in the sight of God as well as in the sight of men; for the Bible, whilst it speaks of all men who have not the love of God in their hearts as equally rebels against God, and therefore equally exposed to everlasting wrath; the Bible, I say, still puts a difference between man and man, speaking of some as "not far from the kingdom of heaven," speaking of others as "sold to do wickedness," speaking of this servant as one who shall be be "beaten with few stripes," of that servant as one who shall be "beaten with many stripes." God recognizes the difference between what is moral and what is immoral. He does not allow one who does violent despite to his laws to receive as large a portion of temporal good as one who yields to them some amount of obedience, so that Israel bowing down to idols can be as prosperous as Israel putting the idols away in deference to his command. The amount of present good is vastly on the side of the decent, honourable, and amiable man, as compared with the profligate unprincipled man. The former may be called the happier of the two; more prosperous in his affairs, more gratified in the attainment of his wishes, more esteemed and more courted by the world. Verily he has his reward. God does not forget him, God does not overlook him; God does not leave unrequited the outward homage which he has rendered to his laws; he gives him what he has sought, just as he did to Israel when he removed the yoke of the oppressor. He gives them a present superiority over the vicious and the profane; and assuredly there is as definitive and as final a distribution of reward and punishment to the two upon earth as if there had been a public process of judgment, and the men had been sentenced according to their works.

Well, then, let us hear no more of the preaching of the gospel as a preaching which levels the distinctions between virtue and vice; let us hear no more of the moral government of God as that which assigns no advantages to the generous and the estimable as compared with the churlish and the base. Those distinctions are recognized in their largest extent, and that government is so strictly retributive that there is nothing too minute to receive from it, either here or hereafter, an appropriate reward. But in thus asserting that natural goodness has its recompense from God, just as truly as spiritual, we take high ground from which to address ourselves to that class of hearers in whom natural goodness is most conspicuous. Tremble ye who are men of virtue but not of piety, whom the world is applauding, and upon whom fortune, as it is called, is continually smiling. We put no slight upon your virtues; we do not refuse to admit your integrity, your honour, your warm-heartedness, your liberality, nay, we will not even say that these virtues are without worth in God's sight, and will not receive a recompense at God's hands; rather we say unto you, "Verily ye have your reward." You read in the book of Psalms of men who have their portion in this life. O think with yourselves whether this may not be your case. Is it not too possible that whilst what is naturally excellent obtains for you a measure of happiness here, the want of what is spiritually excellent may cause you to be consigned to misery hereafter? You live beneath a retributive government; you shall not have to say you do well for nothing; but the retributions of good may last only for a few years, and then the retributions of evil will crowd upon you in eternity.

But, on the other hand, though it may be indirectly that there is encouragement in the text for the contrite in heart, the true disciple of Christ may draw comfort from the case of the Israelites. If God would not leave the show and semblance of contrition without a recompense, will he be unmindful of real penitence? If "many a time turned he his anger away" from those who "did but flatter him with their mouths, and lied unto him with their tongues," has he nothing in store for those who are humble in spirit and who come to him with the sacrifice of a broken heart? O, the turning away of temporal wrath because idols were outwardly abandoned, this is a mighty pledge that eternal wrath will be averted if we are inwardly stricken and flee for refuge to the Saviour. God must have eternal good in store for his friends, if even his enemies are recompensed with temporal good. Yes, as I mark the Philistines and the Ammonites oppressing the idolatrous Israelites, and then see the oppressors driven back in return even for heartless service; O, I learn that true penitence for sin, and true faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, will cause all enemies to be scattered; I return from the contemplation of the backsliding people, emancipated notwithstanding the known hollowness of their vows, I return assured that a kingdom which neither Philistine nor Ammonite can invade shall be the portion of all who seek deliverance through Christ.

THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD.

A Sermon

Delivered on Tuesday Morning, July 29, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

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AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"—Numbers xxiii. 19.

The thing asserted in these emphatic words is, that God is incapable of change; and the assertion is strengthened or illustrated by a comparison between God and man. Were God only a man, were his nature analogous to ours, change might be expected, change could hardly fail to arise, in his purposes and his plans; but being of a nature altogether removed from the frailty and feebleness of humanity, "hath he said it, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" When examining the dealings of the Creator, we are too apt to carry with us our own standards and measures, and to apply them, without considering that what has been constructed for the finite may be quite out of place when used upon the infinite. It is natural, but not the less dangerous, that we should judge God as we might a man, weighing his proceedings in the same scale, and estimating his motives by the same rule. We are bound to guard against this, remembering that the Almighty hath said of himself, "My ways are not your ways, neither my thoughts your thoughts." For want of remembering this, men are often staggered by apparent discrepancies or inconsistencies in the dealings of God. Such and such a proceeding is not such as they should look for, from what they have settled the Supreme Being should be; and then they rush into erroneous conclusions, from want of considering that God is infinitely more than they are able to comprehend, and that he may well, therefore, be unintelligible in his doings, because he still remains incomprehensible in his being. We shall have to exemplify this with reference to the Divine unchangeableness, the property adverted to in the text: we shall have to show you, that men draw their inferences from this unchangeableness as they would from the same property, if it belonged to a finite being, and thus fall into mistakes from which they would be guarded by due thoughts of the difference between God and man.

But we will not further anticipate the subject matter of discourse: we will first speak to you on the fact that God is unchangeable; and then we will lead you along certain lines of thought suggested by the manner in which this unchangeableness is asserted in the text; that manner being one of contrast between God and man. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent."

Now you are aware of the mystery which resides in the very name Jehovah; that awful word which, in the reading of the Old Testament, the Jew never suffered himself to pronounce. It is a word which would seem to denote self-existence, that which, like "I am that I am," excludes past and future from God, and delineates his being as one invariable present. It is not merely the eternity of God, which seems alleged in his title of Jehovah—the fact of his being from everlasting to everlasting; for God might have been eternal, so that his nature excluded equally beginning and end, and nevertheless, he might not have been altogether independent upon time, so that with him nothing has been, and nothing shall be, but everything is. This, however it is, which the title implies, for by using only the present tense, in this sublime definition of himself, God marks out that he has nothing whatsoever to do with the revolution of ages, but that one uniform now constitutes his amazing, inscrutable existence. We do not in the remotest degree profess to comprehend how this can be—how there can be no past to a being who has always been, and no future to one who shall always be. But without presuming to explain, we may perhaps see that such a description is indispensable, if indeed God be every way perfect, for it argues imperfection if there be the succession of events. It argues change, and change, of any kind whatever, is inconsistent with absolute perfection. And this is the point of view under which we would have you regard the unchangeableness of God. God is actually incapable of change; God cannot change; to suppose that he could change would be to suppose him not Divine. A finite being may refuse to change, adhering rigidly to some purpose; but all the while that being is capable of change, there is nothing in his nature which makes it absolutely impossible that he should change. But it is so with God. In his being Jehovah, lies the reason of his being unchangeable. There is literally no power with God, though he be the Omnipotent, of swerving in the least degree from any purpose were he to swerve, though in the minutest particular, it would argue that the purpose had not been the best that could have been proposed; and what becomes of Divinity if there could ever be a mistake—if the plans of a Supreme Being admit of improvement?

We here speak of unchangeableness in regard of God's dealings with his creatures, though of course it is also in himself, in his essence, in his own property, that God is unchangeable; and it is an amazing and overwhelming contemplation, that of our Creator as in no respect capable of change, immutable because infinitely perfect. There is no such thing to a creature as the standing still. The highest angel, the highest archangel must be ever on the advance, growing in knowledge, in love, in happiness: to place a limit to it, were like assigning a period to heaven; when it ceased to go forward, it would cease to be blessed. The creature is made for growth, for the stretching onward to one height after another, and to repress this growth, to place it where there was not room for continued development of capacity, and not material for occupying the successive enlargements, were to make it miserable, to counteract its nature, and therefore to destroy its enjoyments. But oh! how different with God! There is never the least addition to his knowledge, as never the least subtraction from it. He knows no more, and he is no more now, than he knew, and was, millions of ages back. He has made no advance, though once he was alone in the universe, and after what we call unknown cycles of mysterious solitude, he surrounded himself with a countless and dependant population. Wonderful Being, who could continue without the least shade of change, whilst everything changed around—the same in knowledge, the same in power, whilst there seemed nothing but himself to know, and nothing but himself to rule, as when there was a peopled immensity to survey, and an unlimited empire to direct. But this must God be: this unchangeableness is indispensable to the Creator, but inconmmunicable to the creature. It is indispensable to the Creator, forasmuch as the Creator must be in every respect infinite. But all change ends in addition or diminution: if anything be added, he was not infinite before; if anything be diminished, he is not infinite after. But if indispensable in the Creator, it is incommunicable to the creature. We say nothing against the powers of God, when we say that God could not have made an unchangeable creature. Think a moment, though we do not wish to bewilder you with anything intricate. Must not that which is unchangeable be self-existent, and therefore eternal? That which has already had beginning, has already undergone change—the change from nothing to something, the change from non-existence to existence; so that a creature, because not eternal, cannot be unchangeable. God alone is unchangeable, because God alone is eternal. It is self-evident that he cannot make an eternal creature, and therefore certain that he cannot make an unchangeable creature. The creature, then, is changing, the sun as well as the atom, the archangel no less than the worm. They are very sublime words in which the Psalmist contrasts the mutability of the creature with the immutability of the Creator. "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." Was it only of the material fabric of the earth, with its many productions—of the firmament, with its majestic troop of stars, that the Psalmist asserted this? Nay, it is true of the intelligent creation as as well as of the material; true probably in the same sense, for it would seem to be the appointment of God, that the earth and the heavens should be refined, rather than destroyed in the great conflagration. And spirits are immortal: sparks from the eternal fire, they shall never be quenched; but though immortal, they shall not be the same; indestructible, they shall be always on the march. Angel and man, they shall not, as we have already said, be ever at a stand. Stand! when there are new heights to be scaled, new depths to be fathomed? Nay, it were imperfection, it were wretchedness. It is the glory of the Creator that he never changes; it is the glory of the creature to be always changing. Eternity shall be one mighty progress to all except the Eternal; God shall remain the unapproached, the unapproachable, when, through myriads upon myriads of ages, myriads upon myriads of lofty spirits shall have been advancing in the knowing him and in the adoring him. They, as they look back on the vastness of their being, a vastness all occupied in searching into God, shall seem to themselves to have grown almost beyond measure in acquaintance with his wondrousness, but he shall not be one jot nearer the being overtaken by their scrutiny. Immutable in this as in all other respects, in the being infinitely removed from the most gifted of his creatures, he shall still present the same eminence, veiled to the enraptured searching of the glorious throng, and still say to them, as they gird themselves for a fresh inquiry, and therefore fresh change: "I am Jehovah, I change not, the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

But our text, as we have already said, by contrasting God with man puts the Divine unchangeableness under a special point of view. We will, therefore, now leave the general consideration of this amazing attribute, and confine ourselves to what may be gathered from the assertion, that "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." When sin first entered this creation, and our race stood exposed to instant and utter destruction, on account of the original transgression, God, as you know, graciously interposed with the promise of rescue, and gave assurance of a deliverer who should take the curse upon himself. Now, what was to have been looked for from beings thus spared when in the very jaws of destruction, if not the grateful devotion of themselves to their Maker, and the earnest and unwearied endeavour to prepare for that Redeemer whose coming would recover for them every forfeited blessing? Yet, on the contrary, the whole earth was rapidly overspread with wickedness and idolatry, and the beings to whom such great mercy was pledged, and on whose behalf God had covenanted to do a thing which had filled the universe with amazement—these beings seemed to vie with each other in insulting their Creator, and trampling under foot the promise of their Redeemer. Even when one people had been selected from the mass, as the depository of the promise, selected through prodigy, and kept separate by miracle, they seemed to use their privileges only to heighten their scorn. They became worse than the heathen, often excelling them in all their abominations. Now, if this earth had been under the government of any finite being—if God had been a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent—what, think you, would have been the effect wrought upon him by such ingratitude, perverseness, rebellion, and profligacy? Nothing, we can imagine, but that of his being induced to alter his purpose—to give up to the ruin which they had richly deserved a race so unworthy of his favour. Imagine a ruler of less forbearance and longsuffering enduring the rebellion and obstinacy of a world lying in wickedness, and persevering in a purpose of wishing not only to do good to this world, but to do it at a cost to himself which thought cannot measure, much less speech express! Oh! no, it could not be. If God alone were able to redeem the lost, God alone could have borne with the lost till the fixed time of their redemption arrived. Any other than God would have repented; any other than God would have found in the desperate wickedness of human kind more than an excuse and justification for abandoning his purpose, and giving up the ungodly to everlasting pains. But God could not change; it was our defence, our shield, our stay, our deliverance. The unchangeableness of God—mysterious and incomprehensible property!—this it was actually which came between ruin and ourselves; not in the first instance as procuring the promise of redemption, but afterwards, as preventing that promise from being cancelled. Why was there no ebullition of Divine wrath? Why, as there went up momentarily from a polluted creation the record of crime, the cry of oppression, the shout of rebellion—why was not God moved to sweep away by a word from his empire what so deformed its beauty and marred its harmony, that so he might have been surrounded with unsullied worlds, weaving in their everlasting march the melody of one glorious and unbroken anthem? Why, but because he was God, the Creator and not the creature, the infinite and not the finite, the immutable and not the variable? His love was an everlasting love, his holiness an everlasting holiness, his purpose an everlasting purpose; he was the Lord, and could not change—could not, though everything was done to make him change—everything which malice could devise, ingratitude allow, insolence enumerate. Oh! then, men may talk of unchangeableness, as throwing up a barrier between God and the sinner, as though it were all against the suppliant for pardon, that he has to do with a being who cannot alter a purpose; but I see that in one great sense, at least, I am indebted for every mercy, for every blessing, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory, exclusively to the unchangeablness of God. I know indeed that so soon as man had transgressed there came a promise of deliverance—a promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; and you may tell me that the promise was enough for the sinner's assurance, seeing that "hath he said it, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Ay, but what is it which gives such convincing emphasis to these questions of our text? What, but the foregoing sentence—a sentence which, contrasting God with man, shows that though the latter could have changed the former cannot? "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent."

But, my brethren, has it not occurred to you, whilst we have been giving this general illustration of our being indebted for salvation to the unchangeableness of God, that we might have made our remarks more personal, and yet have reached the same conclusion? We will now take the case of any one amongst you, whether the converted or the unconverted; and we will see whether it be not that because "God is not a man that he should lie," that he has not perished in his sins. Who is there amongst us who would not long ago have wearied out any benefactor who was not by his nature incapable of change? It is not necessary that we ascribe anything of what is called fickleness to a benefactor, in order to make good any such case as this. I do not apply the term fickle to a man, if, after long endeavours to do good to another, which were only resented by insult, he determined on leaving that other to himself, and thus abandoned his kind purpose of promoting his welfare. I cannot blame the benefactor, if he cease from acts of kindness, if he even retract some promise or break some engagement, in consequence of the proved worthlessness of the object of regard. I might admire him, if he persevered in spite of all he had to bear; but I could not condemn him, if he gave up in despair. We do not, then, require you to suppose God a fickle being, when we require you to think that if he could change he would cease to bear with us and to load us with his benefits. There is an amount of resistance and ingratitude which could alienate the most patient, the most devoted of friends, if he be not by his nature incapable of change; and our argument is, that there is no tone of us probably who has not reached this amount; so that we owe it purely to the unchangeableness of God that we have not long ago been deserted, long ago cut down as cumberers of the ground. Which of us will venture to profess himself the exception? That man of you who is yet a stranger to the power of religion—who, though baptized into Christ, has lived from his youth upwards in disobedience to God and preference of the service of sin, how many mercies has he abused! how many opportunities neglected! how many privileges squandered! how many warnings despised! how many convictions crushed! Will he say that he has not done enough to weary out a benefactor, and that if God had been a being like one of ourselves, "a man that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should repent," he should not long ago have been left to his wretched devices, the Spirit ceasing to strive with him, and therefore his doom being fixed ere his day of life ended? Or, again, that man of you who, roused to a sense of his condition as a rebel against God, has gone in repentance and faith to the Mediator, and taken on himself theyoke of a Christian profession: alas! what a register is his history of vows imperfectly kept, of dallyings with forbidden indulgence, of hankerings after forsaken pursuits, of deceitful prayers, of heartless praises, of half-performed duties, of grudging sacrifices! Will he deny that he must long ago have exhausted any variable affections, long ago have overtasked any finite forbearance? Nay, he can account for his being still an object of Divine favour and regard only on the principle involved in God's own saying to the church—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." An everlasting love, that is, an immutable love, will explain his being still drawn with lovingkindness; but any other would have left him laden with indignation. So that we can bring in each of you as indebeted purely to the unchangeableness of God for his not being at this moment in the path of destruction. It is unchangeableness alone which could be proof against such treatment as the benefactor receives from the object of his benevolence; it is unchangeableness alone which, after innumerable repulses, would still ply the obdurate with exhortations to repentance, and with proffers of forgiveness—which, unwearied by ingratitude, inconsistency and backsliding, would still bear with the creature, and still open before him the incorruptible inheritance. And then unchangeableness, with all its mystery and all its magnificence, is not merely an attribute to arraign when we would depict how unsearchable is God; it is not merely an attribute to dwell upon, when we would show that the Divinity we adore thought cannot scrutinize; when we would separate between finite and infinite, and prove that the one, in its nearest approach to the other, leaves unbroken the gorgeous gatherings of cloud, the splendid darkness into which the Eternal withdraws, when he would attract yet repel the searchings of his creatures. It is this, but it is something beside this. The unchangeableness of God, exhibited as it is in our text by contrast between God and man, is a property that should minister to our comfort and excite our gratitude; it should occur to us with every mercy that we enjoy; it should prompt every thanksgiving that we utter. It is this which has kept us out of hell; it is this which still offers us heaven. Angel and archangel may fall before God, inferring from his being always the same, that he is indeed wonderful, that his majesty is past finding out, that in comparison of him every creature is vanity, and less than vanity; we too can join in such confessions as these—confessions that must be uttered with a tongue of wonder and of worship; but we have also another inference to draw—an inference of which the angel in his unsullied brightness knows absolutely nothing. Oh! why is it, why is it, when we are continually going astray like lost sheep, doing despite to the Spirit, breaking our vows—why is it that we still have before us the promise of everlasting life, if not simply because, in the expressive language of the text, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent?"

Now, we should like for a moment to bring our text into contact with the common objections which may be derived from the unchangeableness of God. You must know how often it is said—of what use can it be to pray unto God? God not only knows beforehand what we need, but he has fixed beforehand what to give and what to withhold; and forasmuch as he is an unchangeable God our prayers cannot affect him; what he means to do he will do, whether we pray to him or not; what he does not mean to do he will not do, let our prayers be ever so intense; if he purpose to save us, nothing on our part will prevent our being saved—if he purpose to consume us, nothing on our part can prevent our being consumed. This is very plausible reasoning, but very false and very dangerous. If, indeed, any one supposes that his prayers can alter God's intentions, inducing God to do what he had resolved not to do, he supposes what is preposterous, we might even say infamous. No doubt this is what fervent entreaty will often effect amongst men. A man who had determined not to grant a favour may be wrought upon by earnest supplication, so that he will grant it; another man, who had resolved to take vengeance for some offence, may yield to the force of passionate petition, and lay aside his purpose. But here comes in our text. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." Let God have fixed a purpose, and all nature might become vocal, and pour forth one cry for suspension or repeal, but God could not hearken to the prayer, and must proceed to act upon the decree. Wherein, then, lies the mistake? Are not God's purposes fixed, and are not, therefore, prayers of necessity unavailing? My brethren, the mistake lies in supposing, that God's purposes are so fixed in regard to individuals, that he has irrevocably determined what blessings he will give, and what blessings he will withhold. I have no right to think that God has fixed, unconditionally fixed, that I shall have this good, and that I shall not have that; but I will tell you what I have right to think,—I have right to think that God has fixed that I shall have such or such a good, if I pray for it fervently, and that I shall not have it, if I do not pray for it fervently. He has made my obtaining blessings contingent on my offering petitions; he has made praying the condition of receiving. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Do I, then, pray because I fancy God changeable? Oh! no; I pray because I know God unchangeable. He is unchangeable; therefore I am sure that, having made the asking the condition of having, he will not give unless I seek. Thus the tables are turned against the objector. Has God determined to save me, and forasmuch as he is unchangeable cannot I therefore be lost? Nay, rather, God has determined to save me, if I duly seek salvation through the appointed means of grace; and forasmuch as he is unchangeable, I will use those means with all care and with all diligence. Or again, has God determined to destroy me, and forasmuch as he is unchangeable is my salvation impossible? Nay, rather, God has determined to destroy me, if I will not struggle for deliverance, and forasmuch as he is unchangeable, I struggle that I may not be destroyed. There may be a vague notion in many men's minds, that if they had to do with a changeable God, a God who could be turned from a purpose, a God who could be so wrought upon by entreaties and tears as to forego what he had fixed, it would be all the better for such beings as ourselves, and greatly assist us in securing everlasting happiness; whereas, to any one who will duly ponder our relation to God, it must be evident that if God were changeable uncertainty would break the springs of all moral endeavour; notwithstanding a revelation, we should be driven on a wide sea, without star or compass. What could answer for us that revelation held good? what could assure us that the gospel was not become a dead letter, that faith was any longer important, that holiness was any longer necessary, that heaven was any longer opened? A changeable God might have changed the whole process of reconciliation. What use would have been a code, which might be repealed at any moment, after we conformed ourselves to it? And therefore it is the unchangeableness of God which alone keeps the creature in an attitude of prayerfulness and watchfulness, warfare with the flesh, faith in a bright hope of immortality. You dislocate the main-spring of these, by making God changeable; and that which keeps the structure from falling to pieces is the unchangeableness of God. Then if it would thus act upon the righteous, withdrawing them from prayer, making them forgetful of Christ and careless of good works, oh! think for how much of benefit you are indebted to a truth which you may have been accustomed to regard as mysterious and obscure—the truth of the unchangeableness of God. It is your sheet-anchor in a world of sin and sorrow, gloom and despondency, that you are able to exclaim—"Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" But you could not say this, if you did not know one mighty and overwhelming difference between the Infinite Being and all finite—"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent."

And now, lastly, there is but one other remark that we have to make on this important passage of Scripture, but it is worthy of all attention, as a safeguard against the abuse of what has been already advanced. We have dwelt on the unchangeableness of God—dwelt on it as securing for us a continuance of gracious and merciful dealing, when, if we had to do with a variable being, we should be left to our own devices, and to eat the fruit of our own ways. But you may say, 'If unchangeableness thus prevent the abandonment of the wicked, how can the wicked ever be given up to ruin? Will it not prove that God is changeable, if, having acted lovingly towards them whilst they lived, he pour out his vengeance upon them when they die?' No, my brethren; God may deal for a time in mercy, and afterwards in wrath—not because he can change, but because he cannot change. We may affirm in the general, that there is a purpose of God in regard to every one of us—the purpose that a man shall enjoy the means of grace and opportunities of repentance whilst he lives; but if he die in his sins he shall then be condemned to everlasting wretchedness. It is the unchangeableness of God that provides that the means of grace and opportunities of repentance be continued through life; for any one but an unchangeable One would be wearied out by long continued resistance. But will it not be equally this unchangeableness that will cause the vengeance to be let loose, if death find a man impenitent and unbelieving?

God must accomplish the whole of his purpose, otherwise he would be changeable; he would be changeable, that is, if he did not on a certain event change the character of his dealings, change it from mercy to wrath, from loving compassion to indignation. You could not, therefore, argue more falsely than if you argued against the eternity of future punishment from the unchangeableness of God. It is because God cannot change that those who die in their sins must be consumed. God has fixed and announced his purpose, that the very beings whom he has here made objects of his forbearance and loving-kindness shall hereafter be objects of his vengeance, supposing them to depart hence in rebellion against him; and if, as being unchangeable, he cannot swerve from one part of his purpose, neither as being unchangeable can he swerve from another part of his purpose. It is the very same property of his nature that produces both results—forbearance before death and vengeance after death. Then who, finding himself here dealt with in mercy, will conclude from the unchangeableness of God that he cannot hereafter be dealt with in wrath? Oh, wilfully blind! wilfully deceived! There will be no change in God, when he summons against men the ministry of vengeance, after having here acted on them through the ministry of reconciliation. It is the incapacity of change that will shut up the ungodly to despair, as well as consign the righteous to an everlasting kingdom. If God could change, I dare not say what effect might be wrought on him by the bitter and passionate cries of the multitudes whom he dooms to destruction. As perhaps no finite being could exercise such forbearance as is here shown towards the sinful, so perhaps no finite being could be proof against the agony of those who should implore the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them. But God is unchangeable; and he would change, if at last he pardoned the impenitent. In vain, then, the cry, and the entreaty, and the wild invocation! I seem to behold a multitude gathered before the great white throne; they are those—may none of you ever be found amongst them!—they are those who abused their mercies, neglected their privileges, squandered their opportunities. They appeal for mercy; they urge that surely the love which bore with them so patiently through all their perverseness will not now leave them to sink into wretchedness. But there is a voice heard, which destroys the lingering hope. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." It was written in his word, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." Then, "hath he said it, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" God grant that none of us may ever realise this fearful but true view of the unchangeableness of God! I want you all to know God as unchangeable in his love, unchangeable in the gifts of his Spirit, unchangeable in the kingdom which he has prepared for his people. With this lesson I leave you to-day for my ordinary period of absence; and though, if God spare me to return, it will only be for a short time that I shall still have to minister amongst you, I trust that all my ministrations will lead you, amid the changes and chances of this mortal life, to fix your hopes on a God that cannot change. May that hope be to all of us "as an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, entering into that within the veil!"

Recently Published, Four Sermons delivered in St. Paul's Cathedral, during July 1845, by the Rev. H. Melvill, B.D. See Penny Pulpit, Nos. 2,619, 2,624, 2,627, and 2,633.

OUR LORD'S CONDUCT AT NAZARETH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 16, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."—Matthew ii. 23.

THE Evangelist, you observe, does not here quote from any particular prophet, but generally from the prophets; accordingly, there is no such prophecy of Christ as "he shall be called a Nazarene" to be found in the Old Testament; but the inhabitants of Nazareth were despised and held in contempt, a Nazarene was a term of reproach, and forasmuch as it is the general tenor of prophecy that Christ should be despised and rejected of men, we may safely take Christ being called a Nazarene as an accomplishment of what the prophets had announced, and regard his taking up his abode at Nazareth as an event which contributed to the fulfilment of ancient predictions. We merely mention this in passing: we are not about to enter into any discussion as to how a saying could be quoted from the prophets which is not to be found in any of their writings. The explanation at which we have hinted is, we think, quite sufficient; but we only wish to gather from our text the fact that Christ became, as it were, identified with Nazareth. He resided there so long, and so continuously, that Jesus of Nazareth became the title by which he was ordinarily known. He had indeed been born at Bethlehem, but his parents left the place soon after his birth; he was brought up in Nazareth, he spent by far the greater part of his life in Nazareth, so that he might be thought to have had with Nazareth all those touching associations which bind us for the most part so firmly to the home of our infancy and our youth. And then it becomes a very interesting inquiry, how did our Lord act towards Nazareth? Most persons show particular favour towards the place of their birth or the place of their education; they select such places as those which they would be most ready to distinguish by their patronage. Is anything of this kind to be traced in the conduct of our blessed Redeemer? You may not have given much attention to this matter; it may almost have escaped you in reading the Gospels; but it is, I think, full of interest and full of instruction; we therefore design to take it as our subject of discourse. But before considering the treatment which Nazareth received from our Saviour, let us glance for a moment at that which our Saviour received from Nazareth. We may thus place ourselves in a better position for prosecuting the inquiry on which we wish to engage your attention.

Now, the Gospels give us no particulars in regard of those many years which Christ passed at Nazareth; we therefore suppose that his ministry has commenced, and that our Lord is now visiting Nazareth, in the course of his journeyings through different parts of Judea. Well, how is he received? Why, even less favourably than anywhere else. His townsmen, with the jealousy common to little minds, could not brook his superiority; but remembering how he had been brought up amongst them in poverty, and what an inconsiderable station all his relatives occupied in society, they were offended at him, though they could not dispute either his wisdom or his power. "From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" Thus it was that the men of Nazareth spake, as though the lowly parentage of Jesus, the obscurity of his origin, and the deficiency of his education, had not been so many evidences of his having a commission from God, in place of being reasons why he should be treated with disdain. There is no more curious instance of the power of prejudice than this. A Being appears amongst the Nazarenes, armed with powers which they readily acknowledge as extraordinary; but just because they can show that he had been brought up amongst themselves in want and insignificance, they will have nothing to do with him, and virtually expel him from their coasts. It was this treatment which called forth from Jesus the saying, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and among his own kin and in his own house." There is such a dislike to the seeing one whom we have been accustomed to regard as our equal, or perhaps even our inferior, elevated above us by the display of great talents or acquirements, that we are almost sure to disparage in a townsman, or a kinsman, what would command our admiration in a stranger. When, indeed, an individual with whom we are connected has earned himself renown, and placed his name beyond the reach of envy, we are willing enough to add our tribute of praise, just because the connection has become honourable to ourselves, and a kind of lustre is reflected from a man of acknowledged superiority on the place of his birth, and the circle of his acquaintance. But, nevertheless, those of his own country and connection will generally be among the last to discover and declare his merits: they will feel galled at finding themselves outstripped by one with whom they had thought to keep pace; and it is not until some credit is to be gained by the confession, that they will frankly confess how far they have been distanced. Of course there are cases of exception to this rule; parents, for instance, are never long in discovering, nor loth to acknowledge superiority in their children; they are far more likely to imagine it where it does not exist, than to overlook it where it does. But then they themselves derive a credit from the credit of their children; it is a distinction to be the father or the mother of a distinguished individual; and, therefore, in this case, all the worst, all the selfish feelings of our nature combine to the causing that the prophet is honoured in his own house. But suppose the superior child to be the child of a neighbour, then indeed there will seldom be much of this quickness in detecting excellence, and this frankness in declaring it. Then will petty and jealous feelings produce a constant depreciation of merit. The prophet must make the world do him homage, before he may look for the respect of his own village; yea, even then he may hardly obtain it. You find it recorded by St. Luke, when Christ came into Galilee, after his temptation in the wilderness—"There went a fame of him throughout all the region round about, and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all." And where was it, then, that he was met with captious and depreciatory remark? Oh! not till he reached Nazareth—a place in which from his earliest years he had been so closely associated that his residence there brought to pass what had been predicted by the prophets—"He shall be called a Nazarene."

Now, such was the treatment which Christ received from the men of Nazareth: what, on the other hand, was the conduct of our Lord towards so churlish and so scornful a people? It was his own maxim—"Bless them that curse you, do good to them that despitefully use you." Surely, then, especially as the conduct of the Nazarenes showed that they would need a more than ordinary display of miraculous power—surely Christ will take unusual pains with his countrymen; he will ply them with additional proofs of his bearing a commission from God. Quite the reverse. St. Matthew thus describes what took place at Nazareth—"He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." St. Mark says—"And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching." You can hardly avoid feeling some surprise at this. Our Lord finding at Nazareth a more than commonly strong disposition to reject him; and he takes less than his usual pains to prove his commission. Where men showed comparatively a freedom from prejudice and a willingness to receive him, he multiplied miracles; but where there was most prejudice and least willingness, he refrained from working miracles. In other words, where they seemed least required, they abounded; where most required, they were rare. Undoubtedly this scarcely seems consistent with that proportioning of means to an end which may justly be looked for in the dealings of such a being as God. Let us look carefully at this. Our Lord's conduct at Nazareth requires and will repay your most attentive examination.

And the first thing to be observed is, that though our Lord wrought not many miracles amongst his countrymen, he wrought some: so that they were not wholly left without the means of conviction. "He laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them." And if you think attentively on the nature of miracles, you will see that any one miracle ought to be conclusive, and put beyond doubt the pretensions of the Being by whom it is wrought. It is altogether a mistake to suppose that miracles give evidence in proportion as they are multiplied. Quite the reverse is nearer the truth. The oftener a miracle is wrought, the more it approaches to the not being a miracle. Let the sun stand still for an hour to-day, and we count it the suspension of a known law of nature; let the sun stand still for an hour every day in the next year, and we shall begin to count it the introduction of a new law, and not the suspension of an old law of nature. Our Lord, therefore, did quite enough to establish his commission: no one who had not come from God could remove diseases by a touch; so that he left his countrymen inexcusable when he left them unconvinced. But still you say, more and greater miracles would probably have overcome their unbelief, and why were these not wrought? Christ's object upon earth was to convince and to convert; why then did he stay his wonder-working power, when its additional exercise might have effected this object? Ah! my brethren, do you ask this? Do you not know that God deals with men as with rational creatures; and that if he were to make proof irresistible, men would virtually cease to be accountable? It is not his method to force men to believe; not a method which could consist with the known fact, that we are to be tried by our actions—for actions must be free, ere they can be made a test of judgment; and free they could not be, if God were actually to constrain us to the obeying his will. Christ might have left his countrymen no option—he might have compelled them to believe; but then their faith would not have been voluntary, it would have wanted that acceptableness which faith derives from being the surrender of the understanding and the heart, where they might have been withheld; and though there might have been a demonstration of Divine supremacy, there would clearly have been none whatever of human submissiveness. And be ye all well assured, that whatever sense there may be in which God's grace is irresistible, ye look for what will never come to pass, if ye look for the being forced into righteousness. By secret suggestions and impulses, by gentle remonstrances and dissuasions, does the Spirit of the Almighty operate on your hearts, striving with you to turn you from evil, and to guide you into the pathway of peace. But you have it quite in your power to resist the Spirit. Alas! yes, you have it quite in your power to go down into everlasting burnings, though you have it also in your power to attain to everlasting happiness. And what we now wish to impress upon you is, that it is God's course to do what is sufficient to assist you, but not what will compel you to be saved. I know that, in regard of those who are yet unconverted he might cause his Spirit to act on them with such overwhelming might, that it should not be optional with them whether they would continue impenitent, and unbelieving; I know that he might, as it were, multiply miracles till the strongholds were cast down, and there remained literally no power of resistance. And he might have done this with the Nazarenes; the streets of their city might have been crowded with prodigies, till the amazed and terrified inhabitants had come as one man, and fallen down at the feet of their Saviour. But he would not employ force in their case—neither will he employ force in your case. A few sick folk were healed in Nazareth; and this was enough: the appointed means of grace are brought to bear upon you; and this is enough. And let the instance of the men of Nazareth serve as a warning to you, if tempted to wait till God shall do more for your conviction and your conversion, in place of striving to take advantage of what he already does. Perhaps these men said, 'Oh! that is not sufficient; the Prophet must yet work greater wonders; he has healed the sick, let him also raise the dead; and then, perhaps, we may believe.' But in waiting for greater wonders, in place of yielding to the least, though sufficient, they threw away the golden opportunity, and shut themselves up to confirmed infidelity. They drave from them the Being whose heart was yearning over them with more than human love, and who had visited them in the hope of persuading them to be happy. Ay, and in like manner, if we prove ourselves not to be subdued by the ordinary means of grace, by the admonitions of conscience, by the strivings of the Spirit, by the preaching of the Word, and yet think that God will turn upon us mightier engines—engines, which, in spite of ourselves, will bring us to faith and to obedience—oh! we are but reckoning on an interference which would not be consistent with our own accountableness, and neither, therefore, with the Divine attributes and government: and it must happen to us, as it happened to the Nazarenes, that whilst expecting signs and prodigies which cannot be resisted, the Redeemer will have departed from our coasts. Yes, though he may have been long dwelling in the midst of us, though he may have been associated with us through all the close ties of a visible church—for he did this to his own countrymen, his own townsmen, though he had so resided amongst them and so incorporated himself with them as to verify what had been said by the prophets of old—"He shall be called a Nazarene."

But was it only in judgment, only to punish the obduracy of his countrymen, that our blessed Lord refrained from working miracles in Nazareth? We can scarcely think this. There may have been mercy, as well as judgment in the dealing. Our Lord was said to speak in parables to the multitude, but without parables to his disciples; and yet you would have expected him to have used the plainest modes of speech to the people who were least able to interpret a figurative or enigmatical discourse. In like manner, he wrought fewest miracles where there was the strongest unbelief; though you might have expected him to have given most proof of his commission where he found it most disputed. Now, it may indeed have been part of a penal visitation, of a judicial infliction, that our Lord employed parables, the Jews having deserved that truths should be delivered to them obscurely and and in riddles, so that "seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." But still we may believe, that it was partly in mercy that parables were used. Our Lord foresaw that truth would be rejected, even if most plainly stated, and therefore he determined not to aggravate the condemnation of his hearers by speaking in terms which they could not fail to comprehend. The more plainly he had spoken, the greater would have been their guilt in giving no heed to his message; and we may therefore think that, at times, he mercifully disguised truth, or clothed it in mystical language, because it would have been disregarded, however clearly announced; whilst the sin of disregarding it would have increased with the clearness of the announcement. And thus also in regard of miracles. The greater the evidence given that Christ came from God, the greater undoubtedly the crime of rejecting him; so that every miracle which failed to convince, would more emphatically condemn. And cannot you believe, that where Christ, in virtue of his omniscience, saw that he should be rejected, although he wrought many wonders, he would determine, in virtue of his benevolence, to work only few? He must work some, in order to his own vindication, and to maintain the great principle that enough must be done to render inexcusable every human being; but was it not to be expected—was it to be wondered at—that, when he had gone so far as this, he should have stopped; withholding additional manifestations of power, that he might not ensure additional vengeance? Was it not in keeping with his exquisite tenderness, with that love which was proof against continual ingratitude, that he should do as little as possible towards convincing those who, as he foreknew, would not be convinced, than that he should go on accumulating proof upon proof, or, in other words, penalty upon penalty?

This certainly appears a very probable account of our Lord's conduct at Nazareth. It may have been in mercy that he forebore to work miracles—that he confined the manifestation of superhuman power to the laying a healing hand on a few sick folk. And if this presents the Saviour in that point of view under which we have the most pleasure in surveying him, as full of most tender compassion, it nevertheless suggests matter for very serious thought, inasmuch as it shows us that all that even mercy may be able to do for us may be, that our condemnation shall be less severe than it would have been had our opportunities and privileges been increased. With one man mercies may be multiplied, because it is foreknown that he will, at last, yield and be converted; with another they may be stinted, because it is foreknown that he will continue in impenitence, whatever was done in his behalf. When mercy sees that it cannot raise a man to heaven, it may restrain itself, lest it sink him to a lower depth in hell. And we should like it well considered, whether the case of the men of Nazareth may not be of frequent occurrence in our own day and in our own country. You cannot but observe that individuals are often favoured for a time with spiritual advantages, and then placed in circumstances where those advantages are wanting. This change in religious privileges is constantly occurring. Here is a man who has been brought to attend the ministrations of a very earnest and faithful preacher; he remains unconverted, and after awhile you find him removed to another scene, where he has few, if any, opportunities of hearing God's word. Or again: here is a young person, who is placed for a year or two in a godly family, where there is everything to persuade him to engage in religion; he continues indifferent; then comes a change; he is moved into a circle, where he has no longer the same example, or the same exhortation. Or again: here is a man who has a succession of trials, each fitted to teach him to set his affections on things above; but, in spite of blow upon blow, his affections remain earth-bound, and now his trials seem over, all is going smooth with him, and he is no longer subjected to the discipline of affliction. You are disposed, perhaps, to lament, when you see that means are diminished, or privileges withdrawn. You speak with great sorrow of the man who is taken away from the faithful preaching, or of the individual who, through an alteration in position or condition, appears less advantageously placed than before for becoming devoted to God. And we can lament with you; but we cannot view the case merely as a loss or suspension of moral advantages, which will positively be regained through some fresh change or contingency: it may be so; but we cannot quite repress a fear, that it may be in mingled mercy and judgment, that the man is thus detached from what seemed likely to conduce to his spiritual good. We cannot assure ourselves that it has not been with reference to foreknown impenitence and unbelief—impenitence and unbelief which would not yield to protracted assault, that God has suddenly cut him off from the means of grace, and placed him where there is far less likelihood of his conversion. And therefore, to confine ourselves to a single, but very common case—we cannot look without grievous apprehension on the individual, who, having long heard the gospel faithfully preached, but without surrendering the heart to its admonitions, is about to be removed to another scene, where he will not be exposed to the remonstrances of the minister of God. We see him depart, not, as we think, in the mere ordinary course of events, through a change in worldly circumstances, but rather through a distinct appointment of God, commanding his separation from privileges which he has failed to improve. On a common calculation there may be nothing more accidental than his removal; a turn in business, the death of a relation, an increase or diminution of income, may be apparently the only reason of that alteration in residence, which is to be accompanied with such an alteration of moral advantages; and heartily we wish that it may be so, but we cannot conceal from ourselves the great probability that what looks so accidental is actually an arrangement which the man's indifference to religion has rendered necessary for his own sake—necessary in order to his being preserved from the accumulated woe which must be incurred, if privileges were continued to him, and he remained unconverted. It may be the last act of mercy; it may be all which mercy can do on his behalf, to cut him off henceforward from means and opportunities of grace; so that not so much in judgment as in love, may he be about to be banished from sermons and sacraments, and placed comparatively beyond the reach of Christian instruction. We wish that we could believe it to be exclusively in judgment; we might then think that God is about to teach him the worth by the want of spiritual advantages, and that, when the lesson had been sufficiently impressed, the advantages would be graciously restored. But what say you to the possibility, that it may be in love, that the man is exiled from the fellowship of the church? It is on this supposition that the case seems desperate: yea, paradoxical as it may sound, on the supposition that God is dealing with him in mercy, we are bound to pronounce that there is no hope for the man. If in mercy, it is because God has ascertained that to continue him his privileges, would be to aggravate his ruin: it is because there is a distinct and unerring foreknowledge, that if more were done for the man, it would not produce his conversion, and must therefore heighten his condemnation.

This gives awfulness to a case which, to a casual observer, has no special features, but appears undistinguished by any token of Divine interference. And as we saw one of you, on whom, for year after year, means of grace had been lavished, but without producing vital religion, embark for some foreign shore, where he would hear but little of the God of his fathers, and cease to be plied with the lessons of Christianity—oh, we could not bid him farewell without painful forebodings. There would pass before us, in that moment of separation, the image of Christ departing from Nazareth, leaving his countrymen after but a scanty display of his power, because a mightier display would have ensured to their impenitence a larger share of vengeance; and the words that would ring in our ears, as the sails were spread to bear away to a land of no Christian privileges the individual on whom these privileges had been long bestowed in vain, would be words which described how, from a principle of love, Christ did little, where much would have been an additional millstone around the neck of unbelievers—words which would tell that Christ wrought not many mighty deeds in Nazareth—no, not in Nazareth, though his residence there was for the accomplishment of what had been said by the prophets—"He shall be called a Nazarene."

Now, it is well worth your observing, that in describing our Lord's conduct at Nazareth, St. Mark represents it as not having been altogether optional with Christ, whether or not he would work many mighty miracles there. He says, "He could there do no mighty works;" and St. Matthew says, "He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." You cannot be ignorant that it was our Lord's usual mode to require faith in those who wished him to work a miracle; to make his working or not working it dependant on their believing or their not believing. Now, what were the reasons for this? Probably what we shall now state to you The miracles of Christ, as we often tell you, were significant actions—actions which not only proved his authority, but exhibited his office. This was especially the case with miracles wrought on the human body, such as the healing of sickness, the restoring of sight, the quickening of the dead. These miracles exactly represented what Christ was to effect upon the soul—curing moral diseases, removing moral blindness, giving moral life. In short in all these miracles, Christ was announcing himself as the Great Physician—the maladies of the human soul bearing strict resemblance to those of the body; so that in removing the latter, he figuratively taught that in his spiritual capacity he would take away the former. But if what Christ did for a diseased body were emblematical of what he would do for a diseased soul, how natural, how necessary, that he should require faith in those who sought to be healed! This completes the emblem, or fills up the significative lesson. For Christ, as ye know, will heal the spiritual sickness of none but such as have faith in his power. Finding, then, but few in Nazareth with the requisite faith, he could only, in consistence with his rule, work but few miracles there; and it might be said of him, that he was actually unable to perform many mighty deeds. Ay, and if you have often read, with some amazement, what Scripture says of the power of faith—if you listened to what occurred in the Second Lesson of this morning's service, that if it only exist as a grain of mustard-seed, it can remove mountains, and cast them into the depths of the sea—we may now call upon you for deeper wonder, wonder not at what faith can perform, but wonder at what want of faith can prevent. Here was the Redeemer of human kind, armed with all the powers of Godhead, moving amongst those to whom he was most nearly related, and whom he may have been supposed to have most specially desired to convince that he was indeed the Messiah. Where would he be profuse of his miracles, if not here? Where would he perform stupendous deeds—where show himself Lord over the visible and the invisible world, if not here? O sinners! behold—behold and tremble, at the energy of your own unbelief. In spite of all his power, in spite of all his desire—this mysterious, this mighty personage walks the streets of Nazareth, as one hampered and disabled; few are the demonstrations which he gives of his superhuman character; only here and there can he work anything wonderful. What has chained the arm that could bind the winds? What has sealed the tongue, that could speak life into the dead? Oh! the single cause of the paucity of miracles is to be found in human infidelity; and the account to be given of the Saviour as he departs from his own country is that "he could there do no mighty works, because of their unbelief."

And there is much the same baneful energy in our own unbelief. Hear what St. Paul says of the disobedient Israelites in the wilderness: "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." The Redeemer is verily present in this place—present as he was in Nazareth, with all those energies that belong to him as Head over all things to the church: and why then is it, that numbers depart as they came, careless as to religion, morally blind, morally diseased, morally dead? Why, but because there is deficiency in our faith—in that faith which is outwardly avouched by every man who attends the public services of the church—faith in the efficacy of the appointed ordinances as instruments with which the Mediator works? Come ye up in this faith; hearken ye to the preaching in this faith; receive ye the sacraments in this faith, and there shall be a demonstration in the conversion of hundreds, and the confirmation of hundreds more, that "the Lord's arm is not shortened that he cannot save." But so long as there is little or no practical recognition of the energy of the means of grace, no firm expectation of finding a blessing in their use—there is nothing to be looked for but the repetition of what took place at Nazareth; and the Saviour will perform but "few mighty works" amongst us "because of our unbelief."

How touching are the words of the Evangelist—"He marvelled because of their unbelief!" He was surprised at it—he wondered at it. It would not have amazed him, had prodigy followed upon prodigy—earth, sea, air, all teeming with proof that the Omnipotent was moving through his kingdom, that he might fearfully display his supremacy. It would have been no cause of wonder to him, had stars been quenched, constellations annihilated, and a new army of worlds marshalled on the firmament, for he knew the resistlessness of him who, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth. But the hardness of the human heart—this did amaze him: he seems scarcely to have been prepared for this; "He marvelled because of their unbelief." Ah! sinner, you can do a wonderful thing; you can make Christ wonder. And whence his wonder? Do you ask? Is it not wonderful—is it not well nigh incredible, that after having left his throne of glory, after having assumed our nature, after having borne our sins in his own body on the tree, he should be contemptuously rejected by the very beings for whom he humbled himself and died? Marvel of marvels! It excited the wonder of angels that Christ should die, but the wonder of Christ, that he should die, and not save sinners! But blessed be his name, he does not give up his work of love because he finds so many hearts closed against him by unbelief. As soon as the Evangelist had said, "He marvelled because of their unbelief," he added, "And he went round about the villages teaching." He was not wearied out; he did not give up in disgust. Rejected in one place, he turned himself patiently and perseveringly to another. Then he will perhaps knock again at hearts which may have long refused to open. He may come again to Nazareth; but oh, presume not on his graciousness. He may depart, so as never to return; he may go into the villages, forsaking finally the cities where he has so long in vain striven with the obdurate. And, therefore, tempt him not by any further delay; yield yourselves at once to the invitations of his gospel, the suggestions of his Spirit; and then shall it come to pass, that those of you who have heretofore been a source of wonder to the Saviour shall become instantly a source of joy to himself and his angels. Not ashamed for your sakes to be called a Nazarene, he will not be ashamed to call you brethren, and make you his for ever and for ever.

PREVENTING GRACE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 23, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master."—1 Samuel xxv. 10.

WE do not design to speak exclusively on these words, but rather on the narrative of which they form part. We select them because they excited David to revenge, and it is from his restraining his revenge that we have important lessons to draw. You will probably all remember the narrative. Whilst hiding himself in the wilderness from the malice and rage of his great persecutor Saul, David sent a conciliatory message to a rich man named Nabal, who was shearing his sheep, and, therefore, according to the custom of his time and country, making great festivity. It appears that the shepherds of Nabal had been protected during the time of their abiding in the fields by David and his company; so that, over and above what courtesy might have dictated, in answer to a request for some share of his abundance, Nabal was under an obligation which ought in justice to have moved him to a hearty compliance. But an uneducated or low-minded rich man is almost proverbially insolent. Associate wealth with ignorance, and the likelihood is, that you make a rude and an overbearing character. Money in the possession of a rustic or clown will too often give him nothing but opportunity to exhibit at his ease the ruggedness of his disposition. Accordingly Nabal, haughty in his wealth, and looking contemptuously on all whom he addressed, received the servants of David, as our text tells you, with scorn and abuse, and sent them away not only without granting their request, but with fierce upbraidings of themselves and their master. When the young men returned to David, and informed him of their ungracious reception, the soul of the future king of Israel boiled with indignation, and he girded himself at once for a signal revenge. Without doubt he had endured great wrong, and nothing would be more natural, though certainly nothing less sanctioned by religion, than the determination to go up with the sword drawn to Nabal, and recompence his insolence by exterminating his household. There are few precepts to which our fallen nature is more reluctant to submit than that which forbids our avenging ourselves. It is the prerogative of the Almighty to take vengeance; whenever, therefore, we take our case into our own hands, and retaliate a wrong, we gratify indeed one of the strongest feelings of the unrenewed heart, but we invade the peculiar province of God, and so, by indulging revengefulness, treasure up wrath against ourselves. The first impulse on receiving an injury is, if the power be in our possession, to retaliate, and the likelihood is, that like David we should yield at once to the impulse, without first seeking counsel of our God. We may be sure that the impulse that can survive prayer is the impulse of the corrupt and not of the renewed nature; and we may adopt it as a safe general rule, that the devil has been the prompter, when the action recommended is one of those of whose fitness we feel doubtful, after seeking direction from above, though we may have entertained no suspicion till that direction was sought; and assuredly revenge, however natural to man, and however agreeable to the immediate dictate of the heart, would be always cooled down, if thus brought in supplication to God. The sword half drawn would shrink back into its scabbard, if the injured man just paused to supplicate a blessing on his endeavours to deal back the wrong on the injurer. It is not that wrongs ought to go unavenged, it is that when we assume the right of avenging ourselves we virtually deny that there is a Moral Governor of the universe, who takes account of every wrong done, and who at the season which shall seem best to his infinite wisdom will exact punishment on the wrong doer with the most infinite precision. And David, though a man of righteousness and prayer, acted on the impulse of the moment, and hearkened to the dictates of revenge, without bringing those dictates to the test of prayerful examination. He acted, therefore, wrongly, and though graciously prevented by God from carrying his purpose into effect, he became chargeable with the guilt of forming a rash and bloody resolution. He assembled his armed followers, and immediately took the road to Nabal's house, determining that ere the morning dawned there should remain alive none of the males of the rich churl's family. In the meanwhile, however, Abigail, the wife of Nabal, had been informed of the rude treatment which David's servants received from her husband, and the consequent danger that some violence would be done in revenge to her household. She appears to have been a woman of both sense and courage, and forthwith took measures as wise as they were bold. Without consulting her husband, whose obstinacy probably equalled his insolence, she prepared a present for David, and proceeded on her way to meet the troops whose advance she had such reason to dread. In profane story Abigail had been a heroine; in scriptural she gains a higher title, showing herself a woman of strong piety and faith. It is evident from the tenor of the history, that she went forth in the simplicity of dependence on God, and he who never fails to uphold those who trust in him gave Abigail full success in her enterprise. "As she came down by the covert of the hill, behold, David and his men came down against her;" and immediately, though with every token of respect to one whom she knew to be ruler over Israel, she remonstrated with the leader, and dissuaded him from his purpose of shedding blood. There appears to have been no hesitation on the part of David in yielding to Abigail, and confessing his fault; he saw his errors as soon as pointed out, and with a candour that always accompanies, or rather forms a part of true greatness, owned himself indebted to the woman who had thus courageously warned him back from guilt. Abigail, however, had been only the instrument; David well knew it was God who in his mercy arrested him in his purpose of revenging himself; he ascribed, therefore, the praise of the prevention of crime to him whose grace alone can restrain human passions, exclaiming—"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." Yes, thus was David thankful, and thus did he express his sense of the mercy of having been kept back from sin, though the provocation had been great, and though Nabal had received his message with the taunting and insolent speech—"There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master."

Now, we desire to fix your attention chiefly on the fact, that David held it as a matter for devout thanksgiving, that he had been withheld from avenging himself on the insolent Nabal. You should observe that this thanksgiving proceeds from a man with whom God had made "a covenant ordered in all things and sure;" and that Abigail spoke nothing but what must have been echoed back by a witness in David's own heart, when she said—"The soul of my lord shall be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." David, in short, must have had the best reason to believe, that all his sins would be pardoned, and yet he is not on that account indifferent to the commission of sin; on the contrary, he is just as alive to the mercy of having been withholden from crime as though, supposing it to have been committed, forgiveness would have been impossible, or at the least doubtful. And the great truth to be evolved from this is, that the preventing grace of God, operating to the withholding a man from some sin which he desires to commit, should summon forth all the gratitude of that man; in other words, that the being prevented from sinning is one of the greatest mercies which can be vouchsafed by God to man whilst on earth. We should like you to examine this with reference to the two great classes into which the visible church may be divided—those who remain unconverted and those who have been converted. Why is the preventing grace of God—that grace which withholds us from the commission of a sin—why is this to be acknowledged with thankfulness, both by the unconverted man and by the converted, so that both shall exclaim with David—"Bessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me?" whenever they have been restrained from giving way to a feeling excited by some Nabal, who has tauntingly said—"There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master?"

Now, we believe it to be witnessed by the experience of all ages, that the mischief of a sinful act lies as much in the increased facility which it gives to future like acts as in the exact penalties which it entails on the perpetrator. The yielding to a temptation will occasion comparatively only slight injury, if after yielding once the man were as well equipped as ever for resistance; but the fearful thing is, that the first yielding just makes way for a second, and a second for a third, and a third for a fourth, it being impossible to commit sin without deadening in a degree the remonstrance of conscience, or at least without rendering oneself less sensitive to the appeal. We suppose it, then, every way correct to affirm, that with each successive indulgence of passion there is less and less likelihood of conversion, the man hardening himself by every act of wilful sin, and therefore so stirring the opposition of his nature to godliness as awfully to diminish the probabilities of its ever being overcome. We press it again upon you—upon the careless especially and the carnal—as a truth with which you have the most vital concern, that by every fresh yielding to the cravings of a passion you endow that passion with greater power, and rivet faster the chains of a soul-destroying habit; you place yourselves, in fact, a step lower in the scale of moral opposition, and will meet the next temptation at increased disadvantage. For you must be wonderfully unobservant of the testimony of your own experience, as well as ignorant of that given by the history of men, if you do not know that familiarity with sin will rapidly destroy all repugnance to its commission, and that as ye go on complying with an imperious desire there will be ever an augmenting facility of compliance. There is a very accurate correspondence between our physical constitution and our moral: the great pain in a surgical operation is at first, when the knife is near the surface; the sensitiveness decreases as the instrument descends: thus also with moral sensitiveness; we shrink from the first contact with any form of evil, but if once we overcome our repugnance the almost certainty is that we shall soon cordially embrace it; and if every act of wickedness smooth the way for its repetition, you must see at once of what worth is that preventing grace of God by which a man is withheld from yielding to some potent temptation. The mischief is, that if a man yield, he not only adds to the wrath treasured up against him for former misdoings, but by steeling himself more than ever against impressions, he diminishes the likelihood of his conversion; he will be less alive than before to the warnings of conscience, less affected by the wish of friends and the rebuke of ministers, more disposed to resist the strivings of the Spirit, more inclined to think lightly of eternal retributions. If, then, when plied, like David, with a mighty temptation, soliciting to an act which, if performed, must sear and deaden his moral sensibilities, if preventing grace be mercifully vouchsafed, strengthening him to resist, and holding him back from the commission, who shall question that what has been done for the man demands all the warmth of his gratitude, and that if he be but aware of what is most excellent in benefit, there will be no Divine interference in his behalf which shall more powerfully constrain him to burst into the exclamation—"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel?"

Indeed I know what you may say. 'The unconverted man may live to be converted; if he do, then preventing grace deprives him of a present pleasure, the guiltiness of which would be ultimately forgiven, and thus the injuriousness destroyed. Is this a benefit?' We will not go at length into the hundred answers which might be fairly given to this question. We do not wish that attention should be distracted from the master idea which we are endeavouring to exhibit. You cannot commit a sin, without introducing into the soul a certain degree of hardness, and an aptness to continue in that sin. This truth is finely expressed by an old writer, when he says, "Every act of sin strangely transforms and works over the soul to its own likeness, sin in this being to the soul like fire to combustible matter; it assimilates, before it destroys it. One visit is enough to begin an acquaintance, and this point is gained by it, that when the visitor comes again, he is no more a stranger." And if such be the nature of sin, you have only to confess it desirable that there pass on men that great moral change without which we must everlastingly perish, and you equally confess that preventing grace demands all the thankfulness of the heart; for inasmuch as the commission of sin imprints on the soul a further disposition and proneness to sin, it clearly renders the individual less accessible than ever to the suggestions of righteousness, and thus multiplies the obstacles to the renewal of his nature. Oh! ye know not, when ye do violence to the preventing grace of God—ye know not what a fierce blow ye strike at your everlasting well-being. You perhaps only reckon on the addition of one more sin to an amount already fearfully large, and compute that you may as easily repent of and gain pardon for the increased sum as the smaller; but you bring not into account the greater callousness of heart, you make nothing of a seared and crippled conscience, you pass over unobserved the strengthened moral apathy. You go upon the supposition, that one year will be just as suitable for repentance as another—a supposition which, even if it involve not a long line of falsehoods, marks forgetfulness of the fact, that repentance is God's gift, and not man's achievement; and though it be a glorious truth, that God hath promised forgiveness to every one who repents, it is equally a truth, and that too of the most solemn import, that God hath not promised to give every one at every time grace to repent. Lay, then, to your hearts these several considerations; observe the diminished probability of any attempt after salvation, whilst every moral feeling grows more and more torpid. Remember that forasmuch as sin provokes and grieves the Holy Spirit, the very acts which make a sinner more need repentance make him more in danger of never obtaining it. And can you deny that of all the gifts which God pours down on an unconverted man there is none which can exceed preventing grace in its worth? If David had been an unconverted man, when thirsting for revenge, he was intercepted by Abigail, and if, despising her advice, and thus withstanding preventing grace, he had gone forward with his purpose, and dealt out ruin upon Nabal, the consummation of his design would have left him at an immeasurably greater distance than he before stood from conversion. As the corpse of him who had done the wrong lay stretched before him, and the clear strong flame ascended high, devouring the possession, the least fraction of which had been so churlishly denied, the appetite for revenge would have gathered strength from gratification, and the likelihood would have been incalculable, that in place of being fashioned into a man after God's own heart, David would have hardened into the passionate and the bloodthirsty. So, that even had he been then the unconverted, there would have required no change in his address to Abigail, when dissuaded from his purpose. He would have been a man arrested in a course which was conducting directly to the obduracy and recklessness which make repentance all but impossible. If, then, he had cause for thankfulness that the soul was still kept, so to speak, within the probability of forgiveness and favour, he would only have shown what he ought to have felt, had he burst into the exclamation—"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me." Ay, and it is just the same when the path of the unconverted man is crossed by some monitor who shall warn him back from a sin. The unconverted man who is neglecting the Saviour is but too truly asking with Nabal, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse?" And, as refusing to submit himself to God, is one of that great mass of whom it may unhappily be said—"There are many servants now a days that break away every man from his master."

II. But let us now examine, in the second place, the cause for thankfulness which preventing grace furnishes to the converted. We have already allowed, that in the case of David there was a certainty that the sin, if committed, would have been pardoned; and we must equally confess, that those who are justified through faith in Christ Jesus are sure of finding their every offence forgiven at the last. It becomes, then, a question, though no great labour will be required for its answer, in what degree and in what respects a prevented sin has the advantage over a pardoned sin—why, that is, David, secure of forgiveness, had he gratified his passion, was bound to utter praises for having been withheld from the gratification.

Now, whatever the likelihood, on a mere human calculation, that a man who feels himself safe for eternity will be careless of his practice, there is nothing more certain than that Scriptural belief in our own election will cause us to spurn the thought of continuing in sin that grace may abound. In truth, election, which is mentioned as a Christian's privilege in the Bible, is an election to holiness of life and consecration unto God. It is not an unconditional election to glory and immortality; it is simply an election to all the exercises of self-denial and faith, as preparatory for the blessedness of heaven. And such being our election, there can be no way of making sure that election, and ascertaining it for ourselves, unless it be that enjoined by St. Peter of adding "to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience:" concluding oneself elected, except from a clear sense of sanctification, being much the same delusion as the believing oneself wealthier with no increase of property, and nearer a journey's end without advancing a step on the only known road. It were, then, to show an utter ignorance of all that is most valuable to a Christian, to suppose, that were he certain that a sin will be pardoned it is a matter of indifference to him whether or not it be prevented. We do not deny that there may be equal safety, so far as the eternal state is concerned, whether the sin be committed and then pardoned, or whether it be prevented, so that forgiveness is not needed. But it is not possible that there should be equal assurance of safety; it is not possible that the Christian yielding to a temptation should have that clear proof of his calling which he had when enabled by grace to overcome that temptation. The proof, the only real proof, lies in the growing holiness; and undoubtedly, whenever evil gains the upper hand, there is so palpable an interruption to the sanctification of our nature, that there must be a suspension of the proofs of election; for there must, you should observe, be necessarily this great difference between preventing grace and pardoning grace—we may be quite sure of the application of the one in our own case, but not of the other. If I have been restrained from the commission of a sin to which I was tempted, I possess a proof not to be withstood, that I have been the subject of God's preventing grace; but if I yield to the temptation and commit the sin, I cannot pretend to an equally strong proof that I have been the subject of God's pardoning grace. There may indeed be the pardon where there has not been the prevention; but you may all see that prevention carries with it its own evidence, and this cannot be affirmed of the pardon. I cannot be prevented from a sin, and not know it; I may be pardoned for a sin, and not know it. So that, as it has been well observed, "Grace may have reversed the condemning sentence, and sealed the sinner's pardon before God, and yet have left no transcript of that pardon in the sinner's own breast. The hand-writing against him may be cancelled in the court of heaven, and yet the indictment run on in the court of conscience." And if it be a thing which should excite all the gratitude of the heart, that our evidences of acceptance are strong and uneclipsed, if it be a blessing for which a man's best thanks are due, that, child as he is of frailty and corruption, deserving everlasting exile from the presence of God, he can yet read his name graven in the Lamb's Book of Life ; yea, if this be a blessing, and if, yielding to a temptation, we put from us this blessing, or tarnish its best beauty, where is the mercy which can be said to exceed that preventing grace, and where the occasion which can rival that of our being withheld from some evil purpose, in its demand that we gratefully exclaim, "Blessed, O blessed, be the Lord God of Israel ?"

We thus argue, and the argument, we think, will be responded to by the feelings of every true Christian, that pardon is not to be compared with prevention, on the simple principle, that a sin, if committed, will, though pardoned, impair our evidence of justification, whereas, if prevented, it will rather enlarge and strengthen that evidence. Oh ! we think quite wrongly, if we think that sin ever goes unpunished to the people of God. It may be pardoned, but its commission will grievously interrupt that rich communion with the Most High which is the Christian's solace whilst a sojourner upon earth ; and such interruption is itself a punishment—a punishment which he who has once felt will dread again to incur ; and we say of this punishment, that it is unspeakably more than a make-weight against the transient pleasure won by the wrong action ; so that in the diminished, if not destroyed sense of God's favour, there would have been such retribution for the soul as could in no degree have been compensated to David by the sweetness of a gratified revenge. The interference of Abigail deprived him of the indulgence of one of the strongest and most clamorous of human feelings ; but then this interference secured him the continuance of one of the highest and most excellent of spiritual feelings, and he did but confess that the privileges of righteousness are not to be bartered for the pleasures of indulgence, gratification, and lust, when, full of gratitude for deliverance, he exclaimed—"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me : and blessed be thy advice."

And then, again, there is such a thing as the temporal punishment of a sin, as well as the eternal, and though the eternal be remitted, the temporal may be exacted. We may see it to be essential to the integrity of that moral government which is exercised over man, that sundry of his offences should be punished on this side the grave ; and you must all know that sin brings in its train a vast amount of present disquietude, which is altogether to be separated from the future awardments. In numberless instances it will make a man miserable, considering him only as the creature of time, and taking no account of his being destined for eternity ; and it is undeniable, nay, the strictness of a moral government imperatively demands, that present consequences may remain in all their force, when the future are done away with through the pardoning mercy of God. Was it not this which David felt in an after period of life, when, made the subject of pardoning grace, but not of preventing, he committed the fearful sins of adultery and murder ? God forgave him those sins ; but oh ! how different was his state from what it would have been, if in place of being pardoned those sins had been prevented? He was secure of entering heaven, but he must go heavily all the rest of his days; family disturbances and public mutinies must deform the closing years of his reign; the sword departed not from his house, and sorrow made itself a home in his heart. It is certain that faith in Christ does not put away from us the temporal consequences of sin, though it undoubtedly does the eternal. Conversion, for instance, will not repair the broken constitution of the debauchee; he must endure through the years of his godliness diseases of which he sowed the seeds in the years of his dissoluteness. It is the same in other particulars. So that if a righteous man fall, like David, into sin, the pardoning grace of God may erase the record from the book of judgment, but it will leave in their undiminished force the sentences whose infliction belongs rightly to this life; and if, then, on the alternative of sin pardoned or prevented there may hinge another alternative, that of remaining days passed in heaviness, or remaining days passed in peace, you have a proof that must commend itself to the understanding and the heart, that the pardon is not to be compared to the prevention in its worth and advantageousness. If serenity of mind and repose of condition be in any degree precious—if the clear ministerings of God's favour be preferable to the tokens and actings of his anger—if, for such may often be the fact, the paying through long years the penalties of sin, in the tossings of a disturbed mind, the unkindnesses of friends, the bankruptcy of circumstances, the ingratitude of children, the wastings of sickness—if these be less to be chosen than the spending those years in comparative calmness, surrounded by the bounties of mercy, in the full expectation and in the rich foretaste of joys laid up at God's right hand, then, though pardon be a great, an unspeakably great privilege, prevention vastly outdoes it in magnitude. He who would tamper with sin, if sure of forgiveness, only shows himself unacquainted with the startling truth, that a man may be certain of entering heaven, and yet that it may depend upon his yielding or not yielding to a temptation whether his course to the bright city, though always one of war, shall lie through the waste of despondency, or the garden of hope. Oh! then, be steadfast in your Christian profession; trifle not with sin, adhere firmly to the discipleship of your Saviour, and never give cause by your transgressions of the Divine law, by your ready yieldings to the assaults of the world, the flesh, or the devil—never give cause for its being said of you as the servants of Christ, in the words of Nabal with regard to David—"There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master."

Such are the applications which we would make of the truths which appear involved in the narrative of David's being intercepted by Abigail. We have only, in conclusion, to exhort earnestly all classes among you, that they never think lightly of sin, as though under any circumstances whatsoever it might be committed with impunity. No man can sin, and not in one way or another suffer for that sin. Every sin which the unconverted man commits diminishes, as we have shown you, the probability of his conversion; every sin which the renewed man commits obscures his evidences, and infuses a fresh drop of bitterness into the cup which he must drink ere he die. We would again and again press these facts on your attention, choosing rather the risk of wearying you by repetition than that of failing to fasten important truths on your memories. We would deal especially with the unconverted; we would ply them with the utter falsehood of the idea which we know they secretly cherish—the idea that they may continue awhile longer in sin, and yet not at all impair the likelihood of their repentance and salvation. I put out of sight, though even this is an overwhelming fact—I put out of sight the power which there is in delay of propagating itself, so that when the day fixed for amendment is reached, a day farther off will be reckoned soon enough. I put this out of sight. We dwell only on the truth, that a year hence, if that year be spent in sin, you will not be morally, any more than physically, the same that you are now; you will be a year older, yea, and a year firmer in those withstandings of God which are manifested in your purpose of delay. You will be just so many days nearer death, and so many degrees nearer confirmed obduracy and final impenitence. Ah! it is a common idea, but wonderfully erroneous, that if life be continued, the work of repentance may be done as well a year hence as now, and that there is only the possible intervention of death to make important the entering immediately on the work of salvation. Such idea takes for granted, that there is no paralysing power in sin—that after the known and bold misdoings of a twelvemonth the man will be as well circumstanced as before for commencing the enterprise of a thorough reformation. We have shown you how false this is. We do not say that you will have thrown yourselves utterly beyond the reach of God's renewing grace; but when a case is not hopeless, may it not have become far less hopeful? The ship not yet wrecked, not yet whirling in the eddies, may not her rigging be more torn, her rudder more shattered, her masts more bent, her crew more paralysed? The sick man not yet given over by his physician, may there not be more of feebleness in his limbs, more of fluttering in his pulse, more of glaziness in his eye, and more of wandering in his spirit? Ye cannot continue morally diseased, and not grow worse; ye cannot continue morally in danger, and that danger not increase. The medicine which would be effective now, will be powerless awhile hence; the anchor which would keep you fast now, will be as a plaything when there is more fury in the tempest, and more passion in the waves. If, therefore, ye hope ever to begin, begin at once. You have already lost much time; you are not now as well circumstanced for the undertaking as you were a year back; you are less sensitive; evil habits are stronger. Then pray—Prevent us, O God, by thy preventing grace; withhold us from still breaking thy law! And may it be true of all of us—There are many now a days who break away from the service of sin, and enrol themselves amongst the servants of Christ!

GROUNDLESS EXCUSES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 30, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works."—Proverbs xxiv. 11, 12.

A MAN can have very little knowledge of himself who is not aware of the proneness of his nature to the inventing excuses or apologies for its faults. It is the universal characteristic of fallen man, that he endeavours to extenuate what may be wrong in his conduct. It was the first evidence that there had passed a fatal change upon Adam, that he tried to shift from himself the blame of what he had done, and to palliate the crime which could not be denied. The case was the same with Eve: she, like her husband, put confession in the shape of apology. With the man it was—"The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." With the woman it was—"The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Neither, you observe, tendered a frank and honest acknowledgment, but each, though forced to allow that the fruit had been eaten, strove to advance something in extenuation of the sin. And the disposition which was thus evidenced so soon as there was sin will continue to be evidenced so long as there is sin. You find the marks of it in those who are to be banished from the presence of the Judge of quick and dead. Their language is to be—"Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" This is evidently the language of apology, and not of denial. They profess that they were unconscious that opportunities had been afforded them of ministering to Christ, or that if offered they had not been embraced. So that as the first sinners, when on the point of being cast out from paradise, had furnished themselves with an excuse, thus the last sinners, when on the point of being cast into hell, will have something, as they think, to offer in mitigation of punishment. And you must all feel forced to confess to yourselves, that you are not exempt from this proneness to the making excuses. You must all know, even if you will not all acknowledge, that however ready you may be to pass severe judgment upon others, you look on your own faults with a favourable eye. And it is very observable, that it is not merely to ourselves and our fellow-men that we strive to excuse what may be wrong in our conduct: we do the same with God, as though we did not remember that "all things are naked and open in his sight." But it is a remarkable expression which Moses uses in the 90th Psalm—"Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance;" as though God threw his effulgence on our sins, that their enormity might be made more apparent by contrast. And if we only could think of our sins as thus placed in the light of God's countenance—if we would strive to view sin in the light of heaven—it would hardly be possible for us to look upon it, as we now often do, with a lenient eye, to attempt its apology, or to be satisfied with any of those evasions which a corrupt nature would prompt us to adopt; and we wish on the present occasion to set you all on examining, whether the pleas by which you might think to justify yourselves in regard of your known duties are such as would bear the being submitted to God. In order to this, we must remind you of three particulars which are indicated in our text, and in which God differs immeasurably from men. Men will often admit an excuse without close examination: not so God, for he that pondereth the heart will consider it. Men may examine into an excuse, and nevertheless not detect its worthlessness: not so with God, for he keepeth the soul, and cannot be baffled by any disguises. Men, even when satisfied that blame attaches to the individual who offers the excuse, are often forced to let him pass without punishment. Not so with God; for "shall he not render to every man according to his works?" Thus in each of the questions which Solomon propounds there is an implied comparison between man and God, and a warning that what might have answered our purpose, if we had only our fellow-creatures to deal with, may but cause our confusion at the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us examine briefly into the several particulars which the wise man thus indicates, in order that we may not think that because an excuse passes current with men it will also pass current with God—that we may learn to apply very different rules in the case of credulous, and fallible, and impotent beings, and that of Him who weighs actions and knoweth all things, and possesses as much the power of recompensing as of knowing.

These, then, are the points on which we have to speak. We have to show you, that groundless excuses can be of no avail as made to God, because, in the first place, he is a Being who considers everything, in the second place, he knows everything, and in the third place, "shall he not render to every man according to his works?"

I. Now, it is of course in condescension to the weakness of our capacities that Scripture ascribes to God the modes of action which are found amongst men; but, nevertheless, we may be sure that such representations convey the clearest idea which we are capable of receiving, and we are therefore bound to adopt them with all thankfulness, and whilst we consider them as only approaches to the truth, to endeavour to elevate our thoughts, that if possible we may stretch even further than language with its imperfections is able to define. For example, it is evidently in accommodation to our feebleness, and not because the representation is every way accurate, that anything like deliberation is attributed to God; for it were virtually to ascribe imperfection to the Divine mind to suppose, that it reached its decisions by any of those slow processes, those successive steps, which are perhaps necessary characteristics of a finite intelligence; yet at least let us not fail to embrace the truth which this ascription of deliberation to God is designed to convey—the truth that there is nothing hasty or premature in the Divine proceedings, but that they are as well weighed and ordered, with as much regard to every circumstance and contingence, as though they were the result of long debate or patient calculation. There is something inexpressibly beautiful and consolatory in those representations which set God before us as deliberating ere he acts, and pausing ere he strikes. It is not, as we have just said, that we take such representations literally; we take them only as accommodated to our weakness. But, nevertheless, when thus taken, they may minister greatly to our comfort. It is like telling us how secure we are of being dealt with in the wisest as well as in the most merciful manner. How certain of not being exposed to any of those outbreaks of anger which are common amongst men, to tell us that God considers, and that, as though his decisions took time, he ponders before he determines! He could not have been ignorant of the real state of Sodom; he could not have needed further information as to that state; but you will remember how he speaks. "I will go down and see whether they have done according to the cry which is come unto me, and if not, I will know." It is like assuring us that the fire and the brimstone were not the ebulition of passion, but that the case of Sodom and Gomorrah was patiently investigated, ere judgment was pronounced, thus to exhibit the Divine Being as visiting the earth, in order to satisfy himself by ocular inspection. And that mysterious writing which registered the doom of the impious king of Babylon proclaimed also most strongly that there was nothing hasty in the sentence. "Tekel; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." God was intimately acquainted with every particular in the character of Belshazzar; but as though to inform us that he proceeded not to the strange work of vengeance until he had scrupulously examined every iota of conduct, he describes himself as weighing the proud king in the balances, and not appointing his destruction until he had thus proved him wanting. And if there be much which may well minister to our comfort in those representations which ascribe deliberation to God, there is also much to warn us, much to put us on our guard, that we never think of offering to our Maker the vain excuses which might pass with our fellow-men. If it can be said of God, as it is in our text, that he ponders the heart and considers, what may be offered in apology for an action or omission—who can think it of avail to plead with him what will not bear the being rigidly searched; just as if he were a man who, through indolence or frailty, may be satisfied with what sounds plausible, and take for granted its correctness? We know indeed how often it will happen, that the flimsiest excuse is accepted by men, because they either wish to take no notice of an offence, or are so far indifferent on the matter as not to be disposed to trouble themselves with inquiry. And it is but too possible, though perhaps we scarcely acknowledge the fact even to ourselves, that whenever we are forced to consider our state before God, and cannot deny that this state is such as should excite some alarm, we have a way of flattering ourselves that we have some apology to offer, which, as it passes current in the world, may not be altogether rejected by our Judge. The tradesman who thinks that the claims of his family furnish him with an excuse for making money on the Sunday—the youth who thinks that his prospects of long life furnish him with an excuse for deferring repentance—the voluptuous man, who thinks that the strength of his passions furnishes him with an excuse for his sinful indulgences—the covetous man, who thinks that the duty of laying up for his children furnishes him with an excuse for being illiberal to the poor—each of these has provided himself with a justification of his conduct which will readily be admitted by a large portion of the world. But the question is, whether, knowing and experiencing this, each is not tacitly encouraging the thought, that God will be as easily satisfied as are men, and that the very same vindication which serves his purpose upon earth will procure him acquittal, or at least mitigation of punishment, when he shall be forced to appear at the heavenly tribunal. We can hardly doubt, that if men would be honest with themselves, they would frequently have to own, that a vague hope of passing off upon God what they pass off upon their fellow-creatures enables them to meet the remonstrances of conscience. But oh! if ye could only bring them to think of God as pondering and considering, there must at once be an end to so vain a delusion. If God considers—if he be a God who searcheth the spirits, a God by whom actions are weighed—then I instantly learn, that if there be vanity in an excuse it must be detected, and if there be falsehood it must be exposed. I prevail with my fellow-men, because they do not consider, because of the tendency of an indolent nature to admit without searching, and of a corrupt to avoid the being severe upon evil. Even those fellow-men, if they would be industrious enough, or honest enough to consider, must deliver a verdict altogether against me; and because no such verdict is issued, or even a contrary one is obtained, I come easily to forget, that this is owing to nothing but the want of consideration; and there is but a step between this and the ascribing it to the goodness of my cause, and then but one easy step further to the expecting the same leniency from God as from man. And let it therefore be pressed upon every one of you who may be in the habit of framing apologies for his conduct—of justifying what is wrong in it on the principle that it is unavoidable, or venial, or indifferent—let it be pressed on him as a truth which it is at his soul's peril to neglect, that he has to do with a Being who will admit nothing as valid which he has not subjected to the most rigid tests—one who is resolved on the prying earnestly into every recess, for you may recollect that one of his own threatenings is, "I will search Jerusalem with candles:" and oh! if after this, whether it be the voluptuous man pleading for his voluptuousness, or the covetous man pleading for his covetousness, or the young for his procrastination, the self-apologist will still urge his excuses, and still expect them to be prevalent with God as with man, we can but feel that we leave him his own wilful destroyer; for wherever there is anything analogous to the pretended ignorance, "behold, we knew it not," there is an overwhelming weight of condemnation in the question—"Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?"

II. But Solomon, you see, is not content with pointing out to the self-apologist, that God considers everything; he goes on to remind him that God knows everything. It is perfectly true that one great reason why excuses find so readily an admission amongst men is, that men are inconsiderate, indisposed to the trouble of inquiry, and often too much interested to condemn; but even if this were not the case—if men were not prone to the sparing themselves trouble, and if their judgments were not ordinarily biassed, it must be remembered that they are short-sighted, and therefore liable to decide wrongly, even when they have every wish and take every pains to ascertain the truth; and just as there is risk, that from finding the excuses received without being well weighed by men, we should be led to the hoping, or even the expecting, to find the like with God, so is there a danger of our practically concluding, that much will escape the scrutiny of our Creator, because we observe how much escapes the discovery of our fellow-creatures. There is so much difficulty in supposing ourselves placed under a wholly different order of things, that we come insensibly to the ascribing a sort of permanence to the present—to the imagining that since men cannot act like God, God will at last be found to act like men. And on this account I know of few things more important than the frequent exhibition from the pulpit of the attributes of God. Preachers, it may be, are too much accustomed to abandon what may be called the province of natural theology, in their anxiety to enlarge on the peculiar truths of revealed. They are too ready to assume a universal belief in the great facts of the being and properties of God, because they know they address those who are nominally Christians, and amongst whom, therefore, it were monstrous to suspect any leaning towards Atheism. But when you remember that a belief, if it be wholly without influence, is not a belief which on scriptural principles is deserving the name, we may perceive a necessity for reverting often to the very first elements, and plying men with truths which they never dream of disputing. And thus, if we beseech of you now that you turn your attention on the Omniscience of God, it is not, you may be sure, that we suppose there can be those amongst you who question the fact of God's knowing everything. It is only that we feel, that you may not be making use of this fact, and that through allowing it to rest inertly amongst speculative truths, you may be secretly and almost unconsciously acting on the supposition, that it is not fact at all. And therefore we remind you, that it is the necessary property of the Divine Being, that he should be acquainted with whatsoever was, or is, or is to come, so that to suppose him ignorant or forgetful of the minutest thing is to charge him with imperfection; and this, in other words, is to deny the Divinity. I wish to set before you—I wish you, rather, to set before yourselves, in all its augustness and all its wonderfulness, the fact that in virtue of his presence in every department of the universe, in every star, in every solitude, in every household, and in every heart, our Creator is privy to every occurrence, to every action, to every word, to every thought. You are to regard him as giving what is equivalent to an undivided attention to what is passing in the secrecies of a single human spirit, yea, and all the while extending the same unbroken watchfulness to every member of every order of being, so that throughout the circuits of unlimited immensity there cannot be the motion of a will, nor the throb of an affection, which escapes his observation. And you are further to remember, that God can no more forget than fail to notice, but that whatsoever has been gathered into the Everlasting Mind remains there without the possibility of being erased; so that there would be to the full as much of folly as impiety in the expectation of our sins not being remembered as in that of their not being observed. Yea, to use language more appropriate to the nature of God, forasmuch as there is neither past nor future to that incomprehensible Being, who inhabiteth eternity, he does not wait the happening of a thing before it forms part of his knowledge, neither is it by an exercise of what we call memory that he retains in his knowledge what has long ago occurred. His is that Omniscience to which there has never been an addition, from which there has never been an abstraction; his is that prodigious mind, to which prophecy is history, and to which history is observation—which embraces everything at once, so that it can be said to foreknow or to recollect only in accommodation to our limited faculties—foreknowledge having to do with our future, recollection with our past, but both equally with the interminable present of him who can describe himself, "I AM THAT I AM."

And if this be Omniscience, what shall we say of those who give the least harbourage to the thought, that there can be anything in their conduct which can pass undetected by God? He would not be God, if he could be either unobservant or forgetful of a single act, a single word, a single thought; it would be proving that he was not God, to prove that he was not self-existent, that his power was limited and his holiness defective; but the very same proof would be given, a proof against which it would be idle to set the demonstrations that might be fetched from all that is glorious and amazing in the universe, if it could be shown that there was the minutest particular in the most simple working of the most insignificant being, which he had not marked or ceased to keep in view. Yes, an unobserved look would disprove his Divinity as effectually as the showing that he had a beginning; a forgotten thought would place him on a level with finite beings, just as would the evidence that he was not mighty enough to marshal the planets, nor righteous enough to take vengeance upon offenders. So that if ever there be the remotest expectation that the speciousness of an excuse will procure the being overlooked by God, the imputation would be as virtually an impeachment of his being God at all, as if we questioned whether creation were his workmanship, or holiness his delight. And will, then, any of you be satisfied, because he can offer such apologies for his conduct as are allowed to be sufficient by the most scrupulous and observant of his fellow-men? Will he venture to infer, that there can be nothing to detect, if man have not detected, and nothing to reprove, if men have not condemned? Will he, then, be content that he cannot himself prove his excuse to be worthless, seeing that there is great probability of a man's imposing on himself, and of much being hidden from the most patient self-examination which is open unto him who trieth the reins and the heart? Will he not, therefore, take the prayer of the Psalmist as his own—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts?" Oh! we can now fairly say to any of you who may have been secretly cherishing a hope that the Divine scrutiny into actions and motives will not go deeper than human, you are reckoning on a defect in Omniscience, on a flaw in Deity. You find that men are inconsiderate, and therefore ready to accept excuses without inquiry; but we have shown you that God considers, and therefore you must not expect to find the same readiness with him. You find that even when men consider they are often unable to ascertain the hollowness of an apology, and that a plea is admitted, which, after all, is unsound; but now we set before you the Omniscience of God; with that we meet the expectation, that possibly there will be hereafter something of the same want of thorough information as here proves so much to your advantage; and now go on, if you will, apologising for your love of the present world, for your attempting to serve two masters, or for persisting in practices against which perhaps even conscience itself is frequently urging; you may impose upon others, nay, you may even impose upon yourselves, persuading yourselves, as well as those around you, that illiberality is but prudence, and that worldly-mindedness is but a necessary conformity to circumstances, pride nothing but a becoming self-respect, indolence in religion nothing but a proper circumspection; we leave you without excuse in your excuses, when, besides setting God before you as a God that considereth, we have exhibited him to you as a God that knoweth; for we are sure that none of you, unless obstinately bent on remaining deceived, can continue to flatter yourselves, that what passes current with men, who are ignorant, as well as inconsiderate, will necessarily pass current with God—when we have pressed home upon him the successive interrogations of our text, and followed the question, "Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?" with the yet more startling and the yet more overcoming—"He that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it?"

III. But we have to advance one step further in our exposure of the folly of offering vain excuses unto God. We still proceed on what we believe to be a most true assumption, that men argue from the present to the future, from the human to the Divine, and secretly expect that they shall be dealt with hereafter in a manner analogous to that experienced here. Because excuses are received without much examination by their fellow men, they gradually persuade themselves that they will be so received by God; and because even when examined their faultiness is often not discovered, they cherish a hope that God himself will not search so deeply as to detect the latent fault. But there is yet a third subterfuge which is common amongst men. Even when they have considered and they have discovered the vanity of an excuse, it is common for them to allow it to pass, being unable or unwilling to inflict a just punishment, and often disposed to connive at what is wrong, and to suffer it to go unredressed. And by that same mode of argument of which we have been speaking, the facility and frequency of escaping all punishment upon earth may be made to give encouragement to a hope that there may be something of the like impunity hereafter; so that, even if our excuses should be weighed and their hollowness shown, it will not necessarily follow that vengeance will overtake us. Against this third supposition, to which, as is well known, recourse might be had, when men have been driven from the first and the second, Solomon placed the moral government of God—a government incontestably pledged to recompense every man according to his deeds. We are far enough from sure whether practically there is not more suspicion cast upon the truth that God will punish, than upon those other truths which have engaged our attention, that God considers and that God is Omniscient. We know that when God has been set before men as a Being of unbounded love and kindness—unbounded, seeing that they moved him to give up his own Son for the rebellious and unthankful—there is great difficulty in bringing the mind to contemplate the probability, and, yet more, the certainty that this very Being will finally abandon to wretchedness numbers of those for whom the sacrifice was made. It hardly seems possible, and, perhaps with any but an Infinite Being, it would be impossible, that where love is so strong it should permit the misery of any of its objects. We only appear to be drawing a conclusion which is warranted by the whole scheme of redemption, when we infer, from the vast cost at which we have been rescued, that future punishment, if inflicted at all, will be gentle and temporary. And because there is something so plausible in the inference, the likelihood is great of its being frequently adopted; so that you must believe that many, who know that God will examine their excuses and reject them as truthless, comfort themselves with the thought that, after all, he may not be severe in his retribution. But against this we have to set the express statements of Scripture; we have to protest on the authority of the Bible against the confounding the benevolence of God with that weak and effeminate tenderness which among ourselves would shrink from the infliction of pain, and which would rather that justice be violated and the interests of thousands endangered than leave its objects in misery, however much deserved. I can only regard the Divine benevolence as a principle which leads God to desire and design a universal happiness, to produce on the whole the greatest possible amount of happiness in the immensity which his creative work peopled; and I know not why such a principle as this might not dictate the preparation and permanence of a hell, just as well as of a heaven. I know not why it may not be the very same benevolence which lights the fires of the one and builds the mansions of the other : yes, the very same benevolence ; for, at least, you can never prove that the sum total of happiness will not be increased through there being an everlasting exhibition of God's hatred of sin. You can never prove that the torments of the lost may not be instrumental in keeping other creatures stedfast in obedience, and thus prove on the whole so beneficial, so productive of general good, that even love itself would prescribe their continuance. We take the same line as when taunted with the origin of evil—when told that it did not consist with God's character to allow his creatures to fall,—we challenge the objector to prove to us that a greater amount of happiness would have been produced, supposing that evil had been kept out of the universe. We do not undertake to prove that there would have been a less amount, but we defy you to prove that there would have been a greater ; and while it is all a matter of speculation whether the permission of evil would have diminished the sum total of happiness in the universe, there is no ground for cavilling at that permission. We may be unable to clear away the mysteriousness from the subject, and to show you that of all possible dispensations, the dispensation which allowed evil was the best that could be taken ; but so long as it cannot be proved that it was not the best, we deny that its appointment can furnish matter for the impeachment of any attribute of God. And so, also, with regard to future or everlasting punishments. They are thought inconsitent with Divine benevolence. Who shall prove this ? Who shall prove that the universe, with one fearful section always red with penal fires, will not contain more happiness on the whole than another which presented no such exhibition of the hatefulness of sin ? We do not undertake to prove that it will ; we challenge any of you to prove that it will not ; and therefore the alleged inconsistency with benevolence is not made out. There is no proof that the happiness of the many will not be advanced and made abiding through the punishment of the few, and therefore no proof that it may not be as much benevolence as justice which sentences to torment, and makes that torment eternal. We have not space to enlarge as we could wish upon this part of the subject ; but when you refer to the express declarations of the Bible—declarations which set God before us under the character of an impartial Moral Governor, and give as the sanction of his government eternal pleasures and eternal pains—and when reason, with all its strivings, is unable to prove of these declarations, that they are one jot at variance with what is told us of Divine love, why, we may safely pronounce a man firmly resolved on the being deceived, who can sustain himself with a hope that the visitations of future wrath will be neither tremendous nor enduring ; at least, that he sets his own conjecture against the most explicit revelation, and with a hardihood which is not to be measured stakes his eternity on the possibility that God may be false to his word. And he may not be moved by our declaration of God as a God who considers. He feels that there may be consideration without knowledge, and that therefore the excuse which he has to offer may not necessarily be rejected. We go on to the setting forth God as a God of knowledge ; and though we hereby force him to confess that the vanity of his excuse would be discovered, he takes refuge in the thought that God will not be extreme in taking vengeance ; and having driven him to a position which is only to be maintained by a deliberate defiance of the authority of revelation, we feel that if he persist in apologising for his sin, and expecting immunity, he is not assailable by argument, and must be almost abandoned as one not to be convinced. But oh ! we can pursue him if he fly from the question—" Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?" And we do not give him up then, if not confounded by the inquiry—"He that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it?" But we have exhausted our resources, and are forced to regard him as morally invulnerable, if we find him unmoved by the startling interrogation—"And shall not he render to every man according to his works?"

There remains scarce a moment for applying this subject; but our text throughout has been of so a practical nature that there is little need for any formal exhortation. You will perceive that it has been our object to expose a too general disposition to the making excuses for what is faulty in conduct, and to display the falseness of those grounds on which often secretly, and sometimes even professedly, men rest a hope of escaping the future consequences of sin. Our text has, indeed, a formal reference to the case of the poor and afflicted. Let it be supposed that there are any among you who are unwilling to succour the destitute, and to excuse themselves by one plea or another—the liability to imposition—the difficulty of getting at the truth—the smallness of their own means—they evidently come under the description of those who "forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and them that are ready to be slain," and of those who say, "Behold we knew it not;" and they must reply to that series of questions which we have been engaged in examining. Of course, there may be instances of distress which escape the closest observation, and in regard of which the most benevolent may plead—"Behold, we knew it not." But wherever the ignorance is wilful, the result of indifference as to the condition of the poor, or the selfish resolve to avoid the hearing what may cause pain, or almost compel to the affording relief, it furnishes an excuse which may indeed impose upon man, but which must be worse than worthless as offered to God, who considers, and knows, and will punish.

And, lastly, how apt are poorer persons, or persons who are necessarily much occupied in business, compelled to rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness—how apt are they to make excuses for their giving little or no attention to the high duties of religion! They have so much to do, working for their daily subsistence, and attending to the routine of a laborious life, that they have no time to attend to their souls; and, surely, they say, God will not be hard upon them—he will not expect much from persons so circumstanced. Will he not? Take care how you fancy this. God gives every one time and opportunity enough to know his will and escape eternal wrath. Be on your guard then. Excuses shall not save your souls. But Jesus Christ is able and willing to save all who come unto him. Pray to him. Labour to keep his commandments. Then you may have a good hope that He, who will reward every man according to his works, will take care of you when you die, and admit you for his dear Son's sake to joys that fade not away.

REDEMPTION UNIVERSAL.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 7, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men."—1 Timothy ii. 1.

THERE are some duties whose obligation is known without revelation, and others whose obligation can only be proved by revelation. For example, we do not require a distinct revelation to inform us that a Supreme Being should be worshipped; but we do require such a revelation if we may be instructed as to the nature and constitution of this Being, and so may worship him as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And yet, though we make divisions with the view of simplifying our systems, or assisting our memories, it might be possible to prove that revelation imposes no new duties upon men, but only vastly enlarges the sweep of those inculcated by natural religion. Our blessed Saviour did not busy himself with enacting new commandments, though he so wondrously amplified the old, that they have all the appearance of freshly given edicts. The prime design of Christianity was not to swell the statute-book, but rather to pour a flood of light on well known requirements, and to actuate men to obedience by motives which had not before been brought to bear on their conduct. Therefore, although duties may bear so different an aspect, that we are accustomed to treat them as peculiar to one of two systems, a more careful inquiry might convince us that they belong equally to both, though in the one case under a contracted form, and in the other under a more enlarged. And if there be any exception against this statement, it is probably in the case of the love of our enemies which, expressly taught by revealed religion, could scarcely be gathered as a duty from natural religion. The love of the great body of men might be discerned to be a duty without the aids of revelation, but not perhaps the love of those who may hate us and oppress us. The reasons which make it imperative that we love our enemies, blessing those that curse us, and praying for those that despitefully use us, are such as could hardly have been discovered by unaided human inquiry; they may be said, in short, to be counter to nature, and therefore could not have been reached by the religion of nature. Nevertheless, though on certain accounts the duty of loving our enemies may be referred to revealed religion, it is not so strictly a new duty as an old one more clearly developed and more thoroughly enforced. The Christian's duty is to love all men, no calculation being made as to whether they are enemies or friends; and this duty is nothing else but the duty of loving some, clear from restrictions and expanded without limit. Yet we are disposed to allow that the love of enemies is a duty which may be regarded as peculiar to Christianity. There might indeed have been the germ of this duty amongst those which were prescribed by natural religion, but inasmuch as without the gospel it would seem impossible that the germ should have so vegetated as to render the duty definite and discernible, we do fairly in detaching the duty altogether from natural, and placing it amongst the discoveries of revealed religion. And we are rather disposed to do this because the love of all men, of which evidently the love of enemies is a part, is an obligation which even under the gospel requires no small carefulness of explanation. You must have good reasons for believing that God loves all, otherwise you are only pushing charity beyond that of the Creator when you require of the Christian that he should love all. Therefore the inculcating upon Christians a universal love is the ascribing to God a universal love; and the moment it is laid down as a duty that I should be kindly affectioned towards every member of the vast human family, it is also laid upon me as a fact, that there exists not on earth the lonely being who is excluded from his Creator's compassions. And there is a sense in which every one will readily assent to this statement. No one questions that God loves all men, forasmuch as "he is kind unto the unthankful and the evil," and "sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust." It can be denied by no one that God has what may be termed a providential regard towards all men; but will this providential regard bear out that universal charity which is demanded from the Christian? If, in other words, God's love towards us is nothing more than a providential love, and in no degree a redeeming love, will it serve as a pattern of that unbounded philanthropy which in a variety of passages the Bible enjoins upon Christians? This is a question of some difficulty, but of great importance. If it be our duty to love all men, inasmuch as God loves all men, we must be bound to love all on the same grounds and in the same respects as God loves all; and, therefore, the love which is required at our hands will be a perfectly different thing according as we consider God's love towards all a redeeming love, or tie it down to a providential love. The only fair way of meeting the question is to search the Scriptures and obtain the characteristics of that universal charity which the Christian is to exercise. See how our text will help us. St. Paul is enjoining a duty which we owe without exception to all men. He exhorts, you observe, that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;" so that the love which we are to entertain towards all, is a love which must lead us to pray for all, and to give thanks for all. And if, therefore, we can determine what the condition of men must be in order to their being the objects of prayer and thanksgiving, we shall have ascertained the position which they occupy in the sight of the Almighty—whether that of beings whom he has only created, or that of beings whom he has both created and redeemed. We have thus before us a definite subject matter of discourse, important in itself, important also in connection with other topics of inquiry. Let us go simply into these two investigations, what is pre-supposed of all men when we are bidden, as we are, in our text to pray for all men? and, secondly, when we are bidden, as we equally are, in our text to give thanks for all men?

I. Now it can scarcely have escaped your attention, that there is in our text an accumulation of phrase which must prevent our thinking that any prayer, except the largest and most urgent, will come up to the scope of the Apostle's exhortation. We will not attempt to settle with critical nicety the precise meaning which should be given to the several words, "supplications," "prayers," "intercessions." At all events, these words forbid our thinking that St. Paul, simply requires that we should be, in general terms, the well-wishers of mankind. Had his discourse referred exclusively to the household of faith, he could not have used more unrestricted language, nor sent us to our knees with a broader view of the blessings to be sought for in our wrestlings with God. And as it is evident there is to be a praying for all men, without making distinction between those who seem to us in circumstances which admit of salvation, and those who by their circumstances may appear to us excluded from salvation—if we are to intercede for all men, it must follow that we are to regard all, as we are wont to regard those for whom the pardon is provided; for there is something out of keeping with the notion of intercession, in supposing those interceded for in regard of whom there has been constructed no ground-work of intercession. We just wish by these means, to show at the outset the wrongness of the opinion, that we are only bidden to solicit for the mass of our fellow men the common mercies of existence, that we may reserve petitions which have to do with God's nobler gifts for our pleadings on behalf of a select company of mankind. Had the Apostle been requiring us to besiege the mercy-seat as advocates of baptized men, or of elect men, he could not have used more unmeasured or enlarged terms than when bidding us to gather all men into our petitions, though the greatest portion must be the heathen or the reprobate. So that all are to be prayed for with the same freedom and enlargement of entreaty; and, therefore, whatever basis we have for our pleadings for some, that very basis we have for our pleadings for all. Think then what is pre-supposed in respect of men, when we are commanded to pray for all men.

If you consider prayer attentively, whether it be for ourselves or for others, you must regard it as the most wonderful act which can ever be attempted by a fallen creature. We shall not hesitate to say that so long as the scheme of our redemption is kept out of sight, prayer is nothing but a great proof of human ignorance. When the storm is coming down on his canoe, or the war-whoop of a fierce tribe is heard around his village, the wild Indian will send up a bitter cry for protection to the fabled being who rules the elements, or to the tutelary spirit who inhabits his mountains. There is a natural instinct in this untutored savage, which makes him seek superhuman assistance in the hour of danger, and which tells him that there are above him and around him invisible agents to ward off the hurricane or drive back the invader. But it is just the ignorance of the Indian which encourages him in the attempt thus to enlist on his side the succours of God. The more you could give him a true estimate of the Creator, and of the relation in which he stood to him as a rebel and apostate, the more you would lead him to account prayer fruitless and to give himself up unhesitatingly to his fate. It is not the man who has clear views of God—we speak of course without reference to a knowledge of Christ—it is not the man who out of Christ has clear views of God, who will be bold in soliciting his protection. There may be a kind of poetical or Arcadian theology derived from the brightness of the sunshine and the rich enamel of flowers, and the deep dark blue of the sleeping lake; and taking the gleaming landscape for their page of Divinity, men may sketch to themselves God as unlimited in benevolence, and establish for themselves the doctrine that he will listen readily to their supplication. But, after all, these men are only looking on the profile of nature, and not on the full face. When the sunshine is succeeded by the thick lowering darkness, the flowers are withered, and the waters are wrought to madness, can they find in the wrath and in the fury that assurance of God's readiness to hear the prayers of his creatures, which they derived from the calm and loveliness? The fact is, that natural theology must at the best be a system of uncertainties, a balance of opposites. I should draw different lessons from the genial breathings of one day and the devastating tempests of the next; and though after I had thrown myself down on an Alpine summit, and looked over on the clusterings of the sublime and the beautiful, canopied with an azure that was full of glory, I might have gathered from scenery teeming with impresses of kindness, apparently sending forth from waving forests, gushing fountains, and smiling villages, the anthem of an acknowledgment that God is infinitely beneficent—though, I say, I might have gathered from this brilliant contemplation a hope, that man was circled within the watchfulness of his Maker, and that if I cried unto God there would be a hearing and an answer; oh! if on a sudden there passed around me the rushings of the hurricane, and there came up from the valleys the shriek of the affrighted peasantry, and the torrents poured down in their strength to sweep away the labours of man's hands—the corn, and the wood which had crowned the fields as a diadem—the voice of supplication would, I think, be checked as I gazed on this fearful alteration of spectacle; and the confidence which had been given me by an exhibition which seemed eloquent of the benevolence of Godhead would yield to horror and trepidation, whilst the Eternal One appeared walking before me, the tempest his voice, the lightning his glance, the wild devastation his every foot print. So that we are on many accounts clear that the prayers of the man who is unacquainted with the redeeming work of Christ, are the produce of nothing but his ignorance. We prove to you, that even on the best showings of natural theology, there would be a vast probability against the usefulness of prayer, though there might be also a vast probability on the side of that usefulness. And if you could, as it were, inoculate natural religion with certain of the truths of revealed, so as to show a man something of the fearful disruption which sin has occasioned between the Creator and the creature, and keep all the while in the back ground the means employed for bringing into re-union the far severed beings, why, we are persuaded that you would only throw so much more of uncertainty into the already uncertain matter of prayer, as to scare man from the mercy-seat by weaving around it a still thicker darkness. There is a great deal taken for granted in prayer. When I pray, I assume that an access has been opened for me to the Father; I assume, that in spite of my apostacy, born though I have been in sin and cradled in corruption, God's compassions towards me may not be shut up nor alienated. I assume that some amazing corrective, as it were, must have been applied to human guiltiness, so that the pollution which naturally and necessarily clings to the fallen, is no hindrance to free admission to an audience of Him who is of purer eyes than to look unmoved upon iniquity. And how can I assume all this, unless I bring within my contemplations the mysteries of redemption, and, making my appeal to the wondrous achievement which Christ hath effected on my behalf, fetch from that an assurance that there lies no barrier between myself and the Lord? Oh! it is very easy just to take prayer as a duty, or even as a privilege, to go on for years in its performance, without there passing across the mind the shadow of a remembrance, that man being allowed to pray is the standing marvel of the universe. Before I could be permitted to bow down in supplication, it was needful that the heavens should be bowed down in humiliation. What have I, the child of a rebel seed, to do with asking mercies at the hands of my Maker? Are they not all forfeited? Did not sinfulness bring such a bankruptcy on the creation that there remains no blessing whatsoever in man's birthright? Ay, it is a giant act, this bending of the knee, as a suppliant. The whole work of human reconciliation is gathered into God's permitting prayer. The globe was convulsed and shaken to its very centre before it could become a platform on which man might kneel. We were the alienated, we were the outcast; and had there still rested on the world the burden of unexpiated guilt, why, the cry of a deep and passionate invocation might have ascended from its disturbed and dislocated provinces; but the overhead canopy must have been as brass, and the firmament as iron, and the shriek of the wretched and the oppressed, like that of lost and pent up spirits, would have been reflected back to the suffering to swell the torrent of their next lament. We wish you to be well certified of this truth, that when you pray, you take for granted that God has mercifully interposed and brought us up from our ruin through the wondrous work of our redemption. Prayer is nothing less than the handling of the cross of Christ, and pressing upwards to God's throne with that cross for your passport; or rather, if we may dare a bolder expression, it is man's making his way to the Father through the wounds of the Incarnate Son. So that I cannot pray except on the broad principle, that I have been redeemed; I cannot ask for a solitary mercy, except on the distinct understanding that Christ having destroyed the causes of alienation which had put an arrest on the outgoings of love, it has been made possible that God should again receive me into communion with himself. If then—for we now bring you back to the precise point under review—if I am commanded to pray, to supplicate, and to intercede for all men, what am I required to believe in respect of all men? Beyond all question, that all men are redeemed, that Christ Jesus ransomed all by his own most precious blood; that he has put all into such a position relatively to their Creator, that there lies no impossibility—as there must lie, if they had not been redeemed—against their being objects of God's most favourable regards. It is a truth sufficiently simple to commend itself to every capacity, that if prayer is literally based upon redemption, then all who can be rightly the subjects of prayer must be strictly the subjects of redemption. I cannot pray for a man whom I know to have never been redeemed—a man for whom Christ Jesus did not die. Can I ask God to have mercy on that man's soul? It is asking that the incarnation may take place over again, and that he who has ascended up on high leading captivity captive, may abandon the throne which he won by his agony, and walk once more upon this earth, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." It is only through redemption that there can be the conveyance of mercy; therefore we deny that there can be any asking for mercy, except for redeemed men; and yet, unless I believe that all are redeemed, I am required, inasmuch as I am bidden to intercede for all men, to intercede for some who I know cannot be of the number of the redeemed—who, that is, I know cannot be the objects of intercession, and cannot therefore receive mercy except by God's falsifying his word and denying himself. It will not, we think, be easy to evade this plain and straightforward reasoning. We examine first of all, what may be styled the groundwork of prayer; we ascertain that prayer assumes, or pre-supposes redemption, so that every mercy which is craved can be craved only as one of the fruits of Christ's passion. We then observe that blessings are to be asked unreservedly for all, inasmuch as we are to make prayers, supplications, and intercessions for all. From these several facts, we seem warranted in concluding that all must be included within the ranges of redemption, so that Christ, having purchased all by his death, has procured for all the possibility of being saved.

Such is the use that we would make of the exhortation of our text. We infer from it the grand doctrine of Christianity, even that of Christ's having died for the whole world; and lest it should be thought that this inference is in any degree far fetched, we will just show you how St. Paul supports or authorizes his exhortation. Having enjoined on us the praying for all, he specifies kings and persons in authority, and then adds with a palpable reference to the interceding for all, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth." You observe, that the announced reason, that all should be prayed for, is that God is willing that all should be saved; and if God wills that all should be saved, assuredly all must have been put into a salvable state; in other words, all must have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. It does not fall within the scope of our argument, to examine into the mystery of God's willing the salvation of all, when it is certain that nothing more than a remnant shall be saved. We simply cling to the scriptural statement, and we appeal to your candour, whether we speak irrationally or illogically when we say that if the reason given for our praying for all is that God wills the salvation of all, then the praying for all implies that all have been redeemed? For if God is willing that a man should be saved, he assuredly cannot have made it impossible that the man should be saved; and yet, unless a man be a redeemed man, it is impossible that he should be a saved man. We might add, that immediately after the statement, in regard of God's willing the salvation of all, the apostle describes Christ Jesus as having given himself a ransom for all; and, if in spite of this, accumulation of proof, it shall still be contended that the universal prayer making of our text does not proceed on the fact of the universal redemption of our race, we shall despair of ever producing conviction through scripture and reason. We often bring before you the truth that Christ by his agony and passion redeemed all; because, though it be a truth denounced by those who hold what is called high doctrines, by those who maintain that Christ died only for the elect, it is actually the foundation stone of sound Christianity. The character given of the living God—and who doubts that at the root of true religion lies the character of God?—the character given by St. Paul of the living God, is that he is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe. In this same sense—for he is not spoken of as a different kind of Saviour, in the different senses, but as the same in kind though different in degree—in the same sense that God is especially the Saviour of believers, he is generally the Saviour of all men. This is St. Paul's statement; and if the living God is the Saviour generally of all in that very sense in which he is specially the Saviour of believers, then beyond question all must have been redeemed by him; for redemption is that incipient form of salvation which may be common to all, and yet applied effectually only to some. And we think that by thus making our reference to that noble doctrine of the Bible and our Church, the universal redemption of mankind, we discover to you a solemn basis for that universal intercession which is enjoined upon us by St. Paul in our text. It is in compliance with the injunction, and on supposition of the truth of the doctrine that you pray Sunday after Sunday, in the words of our Liturgy: "That it may please thee, O God, to have mercy upon all men." And, just observe in passing, the inconsistency of some who profess to go all lengths with the Prayer Book, and at the same time all lengths with the Bible. The Apostle in the very chapter from which the text is taken, summing up the exhortation, and the reason on which its fitness depended, delivers his decision, "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." In the first place, then, we supplicate that God will have mercy on all men; all Churchmen do this, for it is prescribed in their Prayer Book. In the second place, we admit, that whatever we pray for, we should pray "without doubting;" all Churchmen acknowledge this, for it is the assertion of Scripture. But if, nevertheless, Churchmen will contend for what is called particular redemption—contend, that is, that our blessed Saviour did not die for all, but only for the elect—where is their consistency? They entreat of God that he will have mercy on all, and yet as they believe that all are not redeemed, they are thoroughly certain that God cannot have mercy on all. But is this praying without doubting? Impossible. You cannot ask without doubting, unless you know it to be at least possible that what you ask may be granted. Into what strange inconsistencies are men driven when they depart from the plain sense of Scripture in order to avoid a difficulty whether real or imagined! It is the plain sense of Scripture that Christ shed his blood for the Jew and Gentile, for the bond and free, that by his death he redeemed all, that is, he put all in such a state that they may, if they will, be saved; and because all have been redeemed, because, O blessed Saviour, thou didst take upon thyself our nature, and didst ransom that nature, and therefore didst place within the reach of all who are born of this nature the choice things of forgiveness and acceptance; therefore is it that our prayers may, and must, go up to the mercy-seat on behalf of all; all shall be the subjects of our petition, for all are the objects of redemption; and we may now acknowledge and appreciate the justice of the ample terms in which the text is expressed: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men."

II. We turn now to the second question—what is pre-supposed in regard of all men, when we are bidden, as we further are, to give thanks for all men? You will observe, at once, that thanksgiving must assume the existence of benefit. If I am to give thanks for all men, it is clear that I must be acquainted with some manifestation of kindness towards all, which may justly summon forth my praise on their account. Unless I have been put in possession of the fact that God has done some good thing for all men, it is evident that I have nothing on which to rest a universal thanksgiving. What difficulty can there be, you will ask me, in fixing upon a cause for thankfulness, when the anthem of praise is to peal out on behalf of the whole human population? Shall we not, you say, laud and magnify the glorious Creator who hath covered the globe with so enormous a tenantry, and who with unwearied watchfulness and never failing power throws his inspection over the countless family, and anticipates their wants; being just as mindful of the poor man going out to his toil, and of the oppressed man ground down by the haughty, as of the lord over a hundred tribes, and of the mighty charioted in his splendour? Who can hesitate, you may say, to give thanks for all when he remembers that God's tender mercies are over all, and that it is in God that all live and move and have their being? Alas! after all, reasoning like this, though unquestionably correct as far as it goes, belongs to that poetic theology on which we have already animadverted. We remember, indeed, that in the general thanksgiving of our church, we bless God for our creation and preservation; and we readily allow that what may be rightly done on our own account may be as rightly done on the account of others. But if we were guilty of an exaggeration in designating prayer as a giant act, we fall into no over-wrought statement if we apply such an epithet to the thanking God for our creation. Conscious to myself of the struggles within me of a principle which can never be extinguished, never be mastered by any process of decay, knowing that the present scene, whatever its cares or its joys, is but the first stage of an unlimited career along which I am appointed to pass—shall I praise God for having endowed me with existence, unless I have assurance that it is not impossible for me to secure myself happiness throughout the infinity of my being? Shall I thank God for the capacity of being miserable, unspeakably miserable, throughout unnumbered ages? I cannot do this. I cannot praise God for the bright sunshine that must light me to the dungeon; I cannot praise God for the breeze that must waft me to the whirlpool; I cannot praise God for the food that must nourish me for the rack! Life, the present life, that single throb, that lonely beat—can I praise God for this, if it must unavoidably usher me into a sphere of wretchedness whose circumference cannot be reached, or turn me adrift on an ocean of fire without a shore, or consign me to that mysterious death which consists in the being for ever dying, that wondrous immortality of being restored as fast as consumed, and consumed as fast as restored? Better, oh! infinitely better for me if I had never been born, I cannot praise God for this. Creation can be no more a blessing than annihilation if I am not a redeemed man; it is this, and this alone, for which you require me to praise God. If I am a redeemed man it is possible that I may be saved; if I am not a redeemed man, then, so far as is revealed, it is impossible. As far as we know from the Bible it is impossible that any man shall be saved for whom Christ did not die. And how then can I give God thanks for all men, unless that I believe that Christ died for all men? Shall I praise him for the creation of others though I cannot praise him for my own? Shall I sweep the harp strings, and bring out the melodies of gratitude, because God has so dealt with tens of thousands of my fellow-men; that if he had dealt in like manner with myself, I should have worn sackcloth and gone all my days in inconsolable mourning? No! I cannot thank God for all men except on the noble principle that Christ has redeemed all men. Creation is a blessing if connected with redemption, but not dissociated from it. And though you may urge, that inasmuch as most assuredly all men will not be saved, there is the same reason against thanking God for all men as there would be, if all were not redeemed, we utterly deny the truth of the argument. If I knew that all were not redemed, I should know that God himself had made it impossible that they should be saved; but if I know that all are redeemed, I know that God has made it possible that all may be saved. Every redeemed man may be a saved man—here we have a possibility; but an unredeemed man becoming a saved man—here we have an impossibility. What then? I can pray for all, and I can give thanks for all, knowing that God has made possible the salvation of all; but I could not pray for all, I could not give thanks for all, if I knew that God had made the salvation of all impossible. The distinction is most simple. It is not necessary for me to know or believe that all will be saved—I know no such thing, I believe no such thing; but it is necessary for me to know and to believe that all might be saved, that no lonely individual on the face of the earth is barred out from salvation, and therefore it is necessary for me to know and believe that all are redeemed, redemption being indispensable to salvation, and yet redemption not necessarily issuing in salvation. And this it is for which we bless, and praise, and magnify the Lord. We attempt no diving into what is inscrutable; we advance no explanation of God's leaving so many nations to continue for centuries unvisited by the gospel; but we look abroad on the surface of this crowded planet, and when there pass before us the troops of the barbarian as well as the ranks of the civilized; when the eye glances from the towering cities with their pomp of architecture to the cavern and snow-hut of the wildest of savages, when the vision rests on the churches surmounted by the cross, or on the minarets of pagodas which speak the existence of a degrading superstition, we can still get uppermost the one great thought, that for the whole varied assembly a Redeemer paid down the purchase money of his blood. And though we may be perplexed at observing that what was done for all seems effectually applied only to a few; we can admire the unlimited extent of the deed, and leave it to God to justify the application; we can find the ground, both of prayer and praise, though faith all the while may be mightily exercised; and thus perceiving that God has achieved a vast, high, and immeasurable work on behalf of all, oh! we will comply with the injunctions of the text: the air shall be laden with our prayers, supplications, and intercessions for all; the firmament shall ring with our thanksgiving for all.

Thus, as we trust, we have sufficiently shown you that the universal redemption of mankind is pre-supposed when we are bidden to pray for all, and when we are bidden to give thanks for all. Our two topics may, therefore, be considered as sufficiently discussed, and it only remains to bid you strive to obey in your practice the exhortation of which we have shown you the propriety. Pray ye for all; give ye thanks for all; or as the Apostle elsewhere combines the duties, "pray without ceasing, rejoice ever more." Who shall tell the power possessed by the meanest of the godly over and above that which appertains to the very mightiest of the ungodly? The poor man, when alone in his hovel, or when he has gathered his boys and girls around him may be literally a benefactor to the world, and bring down by his entreaties glorious blessings upon nobles and princes. Let no one say that he can do nothing for others, whilst as a pleader with God he may "move the arm which moves the universe." If ye be Christians, remember your privileges; pray to God for the world, it is a redeemed world, and God waits to be inquired of, that he may vouchsafe an outpouring of his Spirit which shall prepare the way for the coming of his Son, and for the setting up of that glorious sovereignty under which all shall be evangelized, and the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. Pray for your country; the destinies of the land may be in the keeping of the righteous; be ye fervent in supplication to God, and he may yet hold these islands in the hollow of his hand, whilst his strange work of vengeance is going forward on the earth. Pray ye especially for Christ's church that she may keep her garments unspotted, and be only refined by her adversities. Yea, finally, let us pray each for the other, the minister for the people, the people for the minister, that thanks may be given in the great day of account that we have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTIVE OF SORROW.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 14, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."—Ecclesiastes i. 18.

THERE is perhaps no portion of Holy Writ upon which it is so hard to fasten a spiritual interpretation as the book of Ecclesiastes. The uppermost feeling on the perusal of the book is, that we have before us the work of a disappointed man, grown morbid by his experience of the unsatisfying character of all created good. And without question such a feeling is in accordance with the actual authorship; for Solomon only gave the results of his own experience, when he declared: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." But the remarkable thing is, not that there should be traces of dissatisfaction with the world; but that in a work which is set down as inspired, there should not be a strong appeal from the present and transitory to the future and eternal. We certainly do not find in the book of Ecclesiastes what we might naturally have looked for—those lessons which our religion derives from the vanity of all that is terrestrial. A Christian who takes as his text: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity;" would present us with a sermon which should breathe of eternity; and while setting the enduring things of hereafter in contrast with the perishable things of this life, should animate to the fastening the affections upon treasures which cannot be destroyed. But no such sermon exists in the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon can scarcely be said to reason on the vanities of earth, as a man might be expected to reason unto whom had been revealed the certainties and splendours of immortality; and if the expressed sentiments are such as it is hard to show consistent with Christianity, the natural, and perhaps the unavoidable inference is, that there are not vouchsafed under the law those disclosures of the future with which Christianity came charged. The apparent bewilderment of mind, the weariness of a spirit which seems to have found no resting place, the exhibitions of death uncheered by a reference to immortality or the resurrection; these and the like characteristics of the book of Ecclesiastes ought only to summon forth our gratitude that we have lived later in time, and that we are not forced, even as were the most favoured under earlier dispensations, to grope darkly our way towards happiness and heaven. But whilst there is much in the work in question, whose obscurity we account for from a want of a fuller revelation, there is also much that has been confirmed and illustrated by the gospel of Christ. There is the statement, for example, in our text, which is broader and clearer to ourselves, because possessed of more knowledge, than could have been granted to Solomon, by whom it was delivered. The boundaries of knowledge have been vastly extended since the sentence was first uttered. Not only have there been great discoveries in philosophy and science, but you must take into account the additional mass of revelation, so that knowledge, at least clear and satisfactory knowledge, of the grand scheme of redemption, and the mighty realities of eternity is granted unto us, but was denied unto Solomon. We then have far larger means than had the monarch of Israel, of testing the truth of the maxim, "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." We believe that there is a universality in this maxim which causes it to be applicable in every age and to every individual. We do not indeed imagine that even Solomon intended to imply that it were better to be without the wisdom, since it must have grief as its accompaniment. Neither does it follow, that because in increasing knowledge I increase sorrow, no pleasure whatever is to be found in the acquisition of knowledge. The propositions are perfectly compatible and must commend themselves as such to every man's mind, that he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow, and yet that he who increaseth knowledge is thereby advantaged and perfected. We wish to have this point well defined before we proceed to the illustration of our text. If I lay down the position, "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow," and if I will admit no exceptions to the maxim, immediately you will refer to the knowledge of God and you will pronounce it a paradox, if not something worse, that the knowing God better should be the same thing as the becoming unhappier. But this paradox cannot in fairness be extracted from our text. We certainly expect to show you in the sequel that even when the knowledge in question is the knowledge of God, "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." But then we wish it to be observed at the very outset of our argument, that this increase in sorrow is thoroughly consistent with an increase in happiness, for delight may, notwithstanding, be gained from making progress in wisdom; and above all, if sorrow attend the acquisition of knowledge, it in no degree takes off from the profit or advantage of having the knowledge; the cause for rejoicing may keep pace with—nay, may vastly overpass the cause for lamenting, or the generated sorrow may itself be a communicated benefit. And certainly you may all perceive that if, for example, in knowing God better, I come to know myself better, the knowledge will bring sorrow at the sight of my own vileness, though at the same time it will impart joy at the sight of a mercy not to be overtasked by human iniquities. We wish you therefore to bear in mind through the whole of our discourse, that however we may contend for a contemporaneous increase of knowledge and sorrow, we give no countenance to the notion that knowledge should be avoided because of the accompanying sorrow, or that because in all cases the knowledge is attended by sorrow, in every case is that sorrow more than counterpoised by the benefit. We are persuaded, and we shall now go on to endeavour to show you, that "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow;" and at the same time we are equally persuaded that in many instances, and especially in reference to the things of eternity, the increase of sorrow is the increase of knowledge, and that therefore he alone consults his own interest who seeks the increase of knowledge. With these preliminaries laid down, we come now to a very interesting inquiry. We will, in the first place, confine our attention to the present life; in the second place, we will extend it to the future life, and in both cases we shall endeavour to show you with how great truth it may be said, "In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Now, it is a common observation, and one borne out by the experience of all who are qualified to give witness, that it is the property of knowledge to humble a man and not to puff him up or to make him arrogant. We may take it as a rule that you will seldom find falsified, that where there is conceit there is shallowness, and that the man who has palpably a high opinion of his attainments, and who moves through a circle in all the pride of a presumed intellectual superiority, is indebted to his not being well dissected and well sifted, for the reputation he enjoys and the attention he commands. We do not indeed say that the man of powerful talents will have no consciousness of their possession, or that the man of high attainments in knowledge, will have no sense of the separation between himself and the great mass of his fellow men; but we are clear that the feeling of relative superiority will be altogether kept in check by that of absolute littleness. We are clear that the powerful talents will have taught their possessor their own weakness, and that the high attainments will consist mainly in the finding out that what has been mastered, bears no imaginable proportion to what remains unexplored. It is only he who knows little who thinks that he knows much. He who, speaking comparatively, knows much, will set what he has learnt side by side with what he has not learnt, and in place of admiring his knowledge, will be confounded with his ignorance. There is nothing which, however hard of acquisition, shrinks into so small a space as knowledge when acquired. A library would seem an atom when the bookcase is the mind. So that we may lay it down as an ascertained fact that the acquiring of knowledge is a humiliating thing. Each step only shows us that the plain is broader and longer than we had thought, and the further we advance the further off seems the boundary. Thus, self-complacency at our progress is inconsistent with progress; for if it be progress to discover that we are no nearer the end, what cause of exultation can making progress furnish? It is with the sphere of knowledge as it is with the sphere of light; enlarging it you enlarge equally the circumscribing sphere of darkness; but if it be thus certain that the increase of knowledge is accompanied by, if not identical with a growing sense of absolute ignorance, what can be clearer than that—"he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow?" The man who is consumed with a desire after knowledge will give his days and nights to the exploring one of its departments, or the toiling up one of its heights, and if with a vigorous step he make his way across the wide breadth of the district, or raise himself to some towering summit, will a feeling of satisfaction be uppermost in his mind? Not so; the advance made will be dissatisfying. The further the man has penetrated, the higher he has soared, the clearer view will he obtain of the immense spreadings of knowledge; or rather, the stronger will be his consciousness that what has been investigated is as a unit to infinity when compared with what has not been investigated.

And we suppose it to have been the result of such a consciousness as this, that the loftiest genius and the most varied information have been often found allied with the deepest and most genuine humility; and it is a refreshing thing to turn away from the haughtiness and self-sufficiency of much of modern philosophy, and to behold with what chastened and meek dispositions those whose names are a monument not to be overturned, carried on their searchings into the mysteries of nature. They measured their attainments by what was undone, and not by what was done; therefore, they always found a greater reason for confessing themselves ignorant than for supposing themselves learned. It was not possible, for example, that the great spirit of a Newton should grow vain and conceited as the fields of the firmament gave themselves to its marchings. Onwards indeed it stretched, leaving immeasurably behind the crowd of less gifted inquirers; but then what Newton learned as he leaped, so to speak, from star to star, and from constellation to constellation, was that each new mystery he fathomed served only as the antechamber to a deeper and a darker, and that to exhaust systems were to find systems inexhaustible. Therefore when he came down from some adventurous and splendid flight, and brought in his hands the spoils of planets, and nations thronged around him and hearkened to his teachings, he was still characterized by all the meekness and docility of a child; and in place of the arrogance and overbearing which you might have looked for as a produce of the mental greatness which drew the homage of a world, there was no trait by which the deportment of this being was so marked as by a modesty, and even a diffidence which was proof against success and grew with triumph. We believe of all who have given a like demonstration that high genius is not the parent of pride, nor great learning the nurse of haughtiness; we believe of them that they found the increase of sorrow contemporaneous with the increase of knowledge, and that as they pushed on in the discovery of truth, they became at each step more and more aware of the insignificance of what they knew compared with what they did not know; so that to suppose them puffed up at their own progress would be to suppose them elated at their own ascertained backwardness. We think, for example, that when the telescope and microscope were first put into the hands of the philosopher, then was increase of knowledge hardly to be measured, but at the same time a consequent increase of sorrow. There was increase of knowledge; distant worlds were brought near, whilst worlds were found in every atom and in every waterdrop; and enlarging the field of contemplation man only learned that the workmanship of God, like God himself could never be explored. Man was never so baffled as at the moment when he most signally triumphed. No doubt it was a vast triumph when science put into his hands an apparatus by which he could gaze upon stars which had never been beheld by his forefathers, and carry himself into far off regions which had never before been surveyed by any of his line; and we are far from saying that there was not, or that there ought not to have been an emotion of gladness when long-hidden depths of the azure laid bare their secrets, and the children of this world were allowed to look on and survey a new assemblage of worlds; but what has been the great lesson derived from this privilege, and what have men been most emphatically taught by the discoveries to which the telescope has led them? Certainly, if we have learnt anything, we have learnt that the universe is of an immenseness which overpowers imagination; we have learnt that in all probability, if we could transport ourselves to the most distant star which the optician has brought within the ranges of our vision, we should seem no nearer than at present to the outskirts of creation, or that stretching gloriously beyond there would be the arched fields of another district of immensity sparkling with constellations and burning with Godhead. We have learnt that our own system, with all its wonderfulness and all its magnificence is possibly little more than a point among the masses of the Creator's architecture; and if there came out an edict that it should be swept away, there would be left no perceptible blank in the unbounded expanse which serves as a stage for the display of Almightiness. And if such are the lessons taught man by the telescope, surely the very apparatus which must increase his knowledge must show him his ignorance. He was not only taught how little he knew before, but how little he would be able to know after. Would not then the increase of knowledge be attended by an increase of sorrow? Would not the very boundlessness of creation which he gathered from the disclosures of the telescope, and the fact made known to him by the microscope that in the minutest subdivisions of space there was the furniture and population of an universe—would not these, whilst filling him with admiration for the workings of Omnipotence, have filled him also with regret at the feebleness of his own powers? Would they not have conveyed to him an idea such as he could not have otherwise obtained of the utter vanity of the hope of embracing within the range of his investigation all the marvel and grandeur of nature; and what motto, therefore, could he have felt disposed to grave on an apparatus which amplified indeed vastly the sphere of his contemplation, but which taught him that when amplified the sphere was but a sand grain which, assisting him to be a learner, told him he could never be a proficient—what motto, if not the motto of our text—"For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow?"

And in matter of fact, the earliest and at the same time the most wonderful lesson ever given to this creation was, that he that increased knowledge should increase sorrow. It was the tree of knowledge on which grew the forbidden fruit, by the eating of which our first parents forfeited immortality; it was the hope of an increase of knowledge which moved Eve to the act of disobedience, Satan telling her, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," and the woman perceived that the tree was to be desired to make one wise; and thus moved ate of the fruit, and gave to her husband, and he did eat also. The hope was realised; the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew good and evil; but oh, it was a fatal knowledge! There is not a woe in the long, dark catalogue of mortal afflictions, there has not been the tear shed, nor the sigh heaved, nor the shroud woven, nor the grave dug, which must not be referred to the acquisition of knowledge as its producing cause. There was the increase of knowledge, but with it, and consequent on it, there was the birth of sorrow—a giant so soon as it saw the light. And although it were wrong to argue that the increase of knowledge is now the increase of sorrow, on the same accounts that it was in the case of Adam and Eve, yet we cannot but think that God fastened for ever the same penalty on knowledge, in order that there might be a memento of human apostacy. It was sin in our first parents to seek the increase of knowledge, and the sorrow came as the punishment of sin. Of course we do not say that it is sin in us to seek knowledge; neither therefore do we say that the sorrow is the punishment for the sin. But it is certain that the appointment under which we are placed is nothing but the original appointment continued; and that from the first creation man has been subjected to the law, that to increase knowledge should be also to increase sorrow. And thus hath God ordained that men should, as it were, carry about in themselves the memorial of the first act of rebellion, and that there should be written in their daily and continued experience a kind of history of the fall of their race. We suppose it to be simply because we are fallen beings that knowledge and sorrow must grow together. Once delivered from the trammels of corruption, standing as the sons and daughters of the resurrection, we know that the penalty shall be for ever removed; and that as one field after another of glorious intelligence is given to our search, and we expatiate over mighty tracts of cleared up mystery and developed purposes; each accession to our wisdom will be an accession to our happiness. As we join the assembly of the just made perfect, and catch the flashings of Deity which circulate through the rejoicing group, we shall find and feel that though the knowledge of God and of Christ is literally inexhaustible, the rapture as well as the business of eternity shall lie in the searching deeper and the soaring higher. But until our every faculty shall be finally regenerated, until in all its length and breadth the curse is taken off every man; if we have the knowledge we must have with it the original penalty. Adam, it may be said, won for us the knowledge of good and evil, but then he won it by disobedience, and therefore he annexed to it sorrow. And now, in ascertaining that in much wisdom is much grief, I am only ascertaining that I am myself a child of the apostate. I look upon the thorn and the thistle which the earth brings forth; I see the fixedness of the institution that in the sweat of his face man shall eat bread; I hear the wail of the orphan and the cry of the oppressed; I behold disease and death holding lordship over man; and when all these signs of a stricken and burdened creation have forced on me the remembrance that I belong to a tribe which has thrown off allegiance, I no longer marvel that if I would have wisdom, I must also have grief.

What then, is there no exception? None we believe. It holds good of religious knowledge as well as of worldly knowledge, that to increase it is to increase sorrow. Religious knowledge may be resolved into knowledge of one's self and knowledge of God in Christ. No man knows anything of himself, but the man who is enabled to examine himself by the light of the Holy Scripture, and as self-knowledge increases must not sorrow also increase? What is this knowledge but the knowledge of our own corruption, the knowledge of the deceitfulness of the heart, the knowledge of one's own depravity. He who is increasing knowledge in himself, is he not possessed of a growing sense of his own weakness, his own depravity; his own obduracy, his own ingratitude? He will not seem to himself to be growing better. The proof that he grows better, is that he seems to himself to grow worse; and day by day the Holy Spirit will show him some new and foul chamber of imagery in the heart; day by day this Celestial Agent will unveil some fresh deformity and lay bare some cherished and unsuspected evil. And though it be most wholesome and most necessary that we be thus taught ourselves, can it be denied that there is something painful and grievous in the lessons which are furnished? Oh! if up to his dying day a Christian must be increasing in knowledge of himself, and if this increasing knowledge be an increasing sense, that in spite of all which has been done for him, he is a rebellious, sin-loving, ungrateful creature; will it not come to pass that the more he knows of himself the more will he lament over himself? And, will it not therefore be emphatically true, that "in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow?"

In like manner, with respect to a knowledge of Christ, there will be just that contemporaneous increase which we are setting ourselves to discover. I must know, experimentally know, that Jesus died for me, before I can know anything of the hatefulness of sin; and when a man is enabled to look by faith on the Lamb of God, bearing his sins in his own body on the tree, (and this it is to know God in Christ) then alone will he entertain a genuine and heartfelt sorrow for sin. And the more earnestly he gazes, the more he contemplates the dignity and innocence of the victim, the more he ponders the mystery, that the being who was one with the Father should have been given up to execration and sacrifice, the more disposed will he be to abhor and reproach himself, and the more will he bewail his own guiltiness, which demanded so awful an expiation. It is not the man who sits down to compute by an abstract calculation the evil of sin, who will ever attain to a knowledge of sin. A knowledge of sin is, and must be, a knowledge of Christ; the cross of the Redeemer being the only gauge, so to speak, by which iniquity can be sounded. If I would know the disruption between the Creator and the creature, I must estimate it by the machinery through which re-union was effected; and the man therefore who knows Christ, and who has closed with Christ as a Redeemer, he alone knows anything of the enormity and heinousness of sin. And as this man makes his pilgrimage to Gethsemane and Calvary, and stands by the cross, and marks the agonies of the Immaculate Surety in his last wrestlings with principalities and powers, oh! he will be increasing his knowledge of God's justice, of God's holiness; yea, of every Divine attribute centering itself and satisfying itself in the work of redemption. But as this knowledge increases, as the man learns more and more the vastness of the interference made on his behalf, the greater will be his sense of the overpowering love which prompted and effected his rescue; and the greater his sense of the love of the Redeemer, the more ardent in return will be his own love of the Redeemer. And oh! if as knowledge increases love increases, will he not loathe more intensely and bewail more bitterly the sinfulness which nailed the Lord of glory to the tree? Yea, and will it not continually happen, that as his soul is most elevated with the contemplations of Christ, and he has the fullest assurance of interest in the saving work of the atonement—will it not continually happen that at moments such as these, when knowledge is at the highest, contrition for sin will be most bitter and deep? And will there not thus be given a proof uttered in sighs and written in tears that even when knowledge is the knowledge of God in Christ, "in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow"'

Now, we may, perhaps, though it is rather travelling back in our subject, just illustrate our text by another kind of knowledge.

Just take the knowledge of history. We will suppose a man studying diligently every record of antiquity, thus possessing himself of the events and transactions of which this earth has been the scene. We are clear that he who increases his knowledge of history must have deadened himself to impressions, if he did not thereby increase sorrow. What is history but a record of crime and calamity, a melancholy summary of the woe and the wickedness with which our globe has been burdened? Here and there we have a bright light, some noble instance of the struggle and the triumph of virtue, but on the whole, feuds and wrongs, and rivalries, the oppression of the innocent, the struggles of ambition, the earth reeking with blood, polluted with guilt, and bathed with tears; these are ordinarily the features of the historic picture. Who that calls himself a man can gaze on these and not be sorrowful? If it be true that to read history is to read the proofs of human apostacy, and the curse which it entailed—if it be true that the knowledge of what has befallen our race in successive ages is the knowledge of a long series of evidence of the total corruption and the consequent misery of man, then assuredly whatever the pleasure, and whatever the profit of storing the mind with the facts, the material of melancholy reflection will be forced on us by every page of the record; and we must either profess ourselves insensible to the sufferings with which guilt has endowed human nature, or we must assent to it as a truth that when history is concerned, to increase knowledge is to increase sorrow. And even if the increase of knowledge be a knowledge of the character and happiness of the excellent of the earth, it still brings with it the material of sorrow. Who can read the biography of saints without having two feelings excited in his mind. first, the feeling "how imperfect are the best!" and, secondly, "how much nearer have others gone to perfection than myself?" The first feeling must be attended by sorrow at the resistance which human nature will always oppose to God's grace; the second, at the superior strength of that resistance in myself. Thus, again, the knowledge brings the sorrow; in increasing the one we increase also the other. And therefore we affirm generally of knowledge, that you cannot acquire it without at the same time acquiring some fresh cause of regret and anxiety. If it be knowledge of nature, the further you advance, the more you are dissatisfied, the more hopeless appears pursuit. If it be the knowledge of character, you must think worse and worse of yourself and your fellow-men If it be knowledge of literature, you have trouble in keeping as well as trouble in gaining. What is worth the being retained you will find slipping from your memory, and what ought to be dismissed will be fastened as with nails. If it be knowledge of the world, it consists too often in discovering hollowness where you had expected solidity, selfishness under the mask of generosity, daggers in smiles, and treachery in abundance. And even if it be a knowledge of God, still as we have shown you, the more we know, the more cause we have for self-abhorrence and bewailing. So still, what is it to increase knowledge, if not to increase sorrow? The text holds good of religious knowledge, as well as of worldly. In neither case do we argue that the knowledge is unattended by joy. The telescope and microscope ministered gladness to the philosopher, and they helped him to explore a thousand before hidden wonders, though all the while teaching him the dwarfishness of his highest possible attainments; they made him sorrowful by showing him that perfection would be always out of reach. And when the spiritual telescope is put into our hands, and we direct it to the home of the justified, and lovely things, and rich and sparkling cross the field of vision; or when we are equipped with the spiritual microscope, and can look into ourselves and see a world of iniquity in the tiniest motes that float in the mind's recesses, do we say that it is other than delightful to catch glimpses of the land of promise, or other than profitable to be helped to the scrutiny and anatomy of the heart? Each kind of knowledge is delightful, and each is profitable; at the same time each furnishes material for sorrow. It is delightful to hold the telescope and to see by the lenses of faith the domes and pinnacles of the heavenly city; and it is also profitable thus to occupy the vision of the saints' inheritance, for looking on the recompense we shall be animated to the toil. But who ever surveyed the palaces of the faithful without self-reproach, at the little influence which things eternal have upon him, when compared with things temporal, and without a painful consciousness, that though a king and an heir of glory, his deportment is often such as if slavery were his choice and corruption his element? Nothing so shows man his own coldness, his own backwardness, his own insensibility to the high destinies of the redeemed as a glimpse of heaven. He cannot behold the reserved joys without feeling that he deserves to lose them for the slight hold which after all, they have on his affections. The closer the view the stronger will be this feeling; so that whilst he is enraptured at the disclosures of the telescope, yea, and excited by them to exertion, he will be covered with shame at his own lukewarmness in the pursuit of what is infinitely desirable. And thus it will come to pass, that though there is joy, and though there is profit in increasing knowledge, he will increase also sorrow. And if, laying down the telescope, he take up the microscope, and subject his own heart to the magnifying power, then we need not tell you that it is profitable for him to be informed of the depth and extent of the corruption, and we need not tell you that it is delightful for him to be thus informed, seeing that the nature of the instruction proves God's Spirit to be the instructor, and any proof that we are taught of the Spirit is too precious to be bartered for the universe. But neither, at the same time, need we tell you that it is a saddening thing to be shown one's own vileness—vileness resisting all processes of sanctification; and thus, though with the moral microscope, as with the natural, joy and profit are gained from its showings, it remains true of both, that in increasing knowledge, they increase also sorrow.

We do not strive to win you by false pretences; we own that in seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness you will increase sorrow, seeing that assuredly you will increase knowledge; but with this increase of sorrow there shall be that serenity of spirit, that counterpoise of joy, which will still make it true that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness." The difference between the Christian man and the man of the world is, that our text applies to the Christian only in this life, but it applies to the man of the world throughout eternity. Both shall increase in knowledge for ever and ever, but in increasing knowledge the redeemed shall increase joy, each new discovery sending a fresh wave of delight through the shining assembly; but to the lost, to increase knowledge shall be for ever and ever to increase sorrow. Knowledge shall increase, but knowledge shall be sorrow. They shall know more and more that they were their own destroyers, and this is sorrow. They shall know more and more that God is just in punishing them, and this is sorrow—oh, may none of us know how gnawing! Seek that knowledge which leaves sorrow in the grave, not that which carries sorrow into eternity. Yes, though there will be a contemporaneous increase of knowledge and of sorrow, yet is it so certain that "they who sow in tears shall reap in joy;" and we beseech you to make it a prayer for yourselves, as it is ours for you, that you may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHRIST STOPPING AT EMMAUS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 21, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"—Luke xxiv. 32.

MOST of you will remember at once the narrative which is connected with these words. Our blessed Lord and Saviour had on the third day risen from the dead, according to his oft repeated prophecy. He had already shown himself to certain of his followers, though so little were they in expectation of his resurrection that they could scarcely credit the evidence of their senses; and now, as the eventful day drew towards a close, and found many of the disciples bewildered, rather than convinced, it happened that two of them went towards a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs. As they walked they communed together and reasoned, their subject of discourse being, as appears from the sequel, the death of their Master and the strange rumour of his being yet alive. Whilst they are thus engaged in earnest conversation they are joined by another traveller, none other than the risen Redeemer himself; but their eyes were supernaturally holden, so that they had no suspicion who their companion was. Christ accosted them as one who had been observing the dejection of their deportment, as well as the earnestness of their discourse. "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?" The answer of the disciples is one every way remarkable, as expressive of surprise that even a stranger in Jerusalem, as possibly he might be, could have any doubt as to the subject which was engrossing their thoughts. It is a striking testimony to the deep interest that was felt by all classes in the death of our Lord, that those who were discoursing concerning it on the high road took for granted that every one they met must know without asking what engaged their conversation. "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" On this our Lord, as though ignorant, demands, "What things?" designing to draw from them a statement of their feelings, on which he might ground an instructive discourse. His disciples then mentioned the crucifixion of Jesus and the disappearance of the body from the sepulchre, acknowledging at the same time what their hopes had been, and implying that they had been completely overthrown. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." It was then that our Lord commenced what every Christian must have longed to possess—that sermon in which, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Oh! to have heard this exposition of prophecy, this explanation of all the types of the law, and of all the visions of Seers—the Redeemer himself collecting and centreing in himself the scattered rays which had been vouchsafed since the beginning of the world! We gather the power of the sermon from the words of the text: "Did not our heart burn within us?" And well was it for the disciples that they had thus listened with earnestness and eagerness to the Saviour's discourse. If they had not—if their hearts had not burned within them—they would have lost the blessed manifestation with which they were afterwards favoured, and Christ would not have been made known to them in the breaking of bread. This appears from a remarkable circumstance on which we wish especially to fix your attention. Whilst Christ was still discoursing, "they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went." Now observe what follows. "And he"—that is, Christ—"made as though he would have gone further." The expression implies that our Lord made a kind of show of intending to proceed, as though to try the disciples, to know whether they were so much interested in his conversation that they would be reluctant to lose his society. And the disciples were not willing to part with their unknown Teacher; their hearts had burned within them; and you read, "they constrained him, saying, Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." Satisfied, by this evidence of a wish for further communications, that they had not been inattentive or indifferent hearers of what he had advanced, our Lord yielded to their request, and went in to tarry with them; and then it was that he was graciously pleased to vouchsafe them the manifestation of himself; for whilst "he sat at meat with them he took bread, and blessed it, and brake;" and it came to pass that as he performed this well remembered sacramental act, the eyes of the disciples were opened, and they instantly recognized their Lord. But they would have missed this—here is the gist of the matter—they would have missed this, had not their hearts burned within them; for had they not been deeply interested in his discourse, they would not have constrained Christ, when "he made as though he would have gone further;" and Christ, we may believe, would have actually passed on, and left them without proof of his having risen from the dead. Here, then, are points of very great interest. We have a striking illustration of our Lord's method of teaching, which was to give more when that already given had been duly received. We have also a most emphatic warning as to the danger of losing golden opportunities, or of letting slip through ignorance or procrastination the means of acquiring great accessions of knowledge and grace. These truths will open before you as we proceed: at present we need only announce, as the general object of our discourse, the showing you how near the disciples were to the losing the manifestation of their Master, forasmuch as though "he made as though he would have gone further," and how certainly they would have lost that manifestation, had they not been enabled to say with perfect truth, in the words of our text—"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

Now, you may all see, if you study with any attention the record of our blessed Saviour's ministrations, that he required a peculiar state of mind in those to whom he taught truth, withholding it where likely to be despised or made an instrument of injury, but imparting it where he saw that it would be reverently and profitably received. It was evidently a principle with Christ, as indeed he expressly announced, to give more where what had been given had been duly improved, so that fresh communications were made to depend upon men's use of past. He did not pretend to open truth after truth, just as though his whole business had been to furnish to the world a certain amount of revelation, whether they would hear or whether they would forbear; but he watched with great attentiveness the reception of truth, and he added or withheld according as that reception did or did not indicate love for truth and a readiness to obey its demands. And the importance to ourselves of observing the course which Christ pursued upon earth lies mainly in this. We have no reason to suppose that such course was followed only in the days of his public ministrations, but rather, that it was universally characteristic of God's spiritual dealings. You will never make way with the Bible by going to it in a spirit of speculation, carrying to it the same feelings as to a treatise on some branch of human science. It is not indeed now, as it was when our Lord personally taught; when the letter, so to speak, of Scripture might be variously distributed, according to men's various dispositions and capacities, but it still is, that the letter, though equally accessible to all, is not equally illuminated to all; and by keeping altogether to himself the power of illuminating the page, so that he can leave that a parable to one which he clears from all mystery to another, God can cause that now, as much as in the days of the Redeemer, the amount of knowledge shall be proportioned to certain moral qualities and acts. You may be sure that it is as true now as ever it was, and in as large a sense, that "whosoever doeth the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine;" for there are innermost meanings in Scripture which will never be reached through learning and ingenuity, but which open before the humble and prayerful inquiry; so that passages on which criticism is vainly turning all its strength, and to which it can attach none but an obscure and unimportant sense, reveal to many an uneducated and simple minded Christian the counsels of God and the glories of eternity; so that it still depends on your love for truth, and on your willingness to act on it so fast as discovered, whether you shall grow in the knowledge of heavenly things; just as it was in the days of the Redeemer, when a parable was employed to veil truth from the careless, or a miracle concealed, to withhold evidence from the obstinate. The method now, even as it was then, of advancing in acquaintance with the things of the kingdom, is to cultivate pious dispositions: for "the pure in heart" are they to whom it is promised that "they shall see God." And practically to remember the truth, so fast as acquired, is not merely to have it stored into the memory, but woven into the practice. Let there be a real anxiety for spiritual wisdom, an honest wish to ascertain in order that you may obey the Divine will, and one lesson shall lead on to another, and you shall always he drawing from Scripture, and yet always feeling yourself to be further off than ever from exhausting its stores. But never think that an unaided intellect can master scriptural difficulties, or that unimproved knowledge can be a good thing. There is a certain point up to which Divine teaching will advance, but there will pause, in order that it may be ascertained whether you prize what you have learned, and are sincere in the desire to learn more; and whilst many a humble student, who shows deep interest in truth, a ready submissiveness to its statements, and a cordial obedience to its demands, goes forward from secret to secret, as though field after field were opened to his survey, many a self-sufficient reasoner, though armed with all the appliances which learning can give, never virtually gets beyond the elements, ever searching, but never discovering. And all this was imaged by the conduct of Christ with reference to his disciples. This "making as though he would have gone further," was but an instance of that cautiousness of which we have spoken as characteristic of his ministry. He just wanted to have evidence whether truth were duly loved; for on his finding that evidence depended, according to his universal rule, his continuing his instruction. And there is every now and then, in regard of yourselves, this stopping at Emmaus, that it may be seen whether you are willing to part with you teacher. A certain amount of knowledge has been vouchsafed, and then comes a pause: the Instructing Spirit makes as though it would leave you—not indeed wishing to withdraw, but resolving to do so, unless it shall be seen that you earnestly desire His continuance. If you prove yourselves careless and lukewarm—no burning of the heart—indifferent whether further truth be communicated at once, or whether the time of communication be deferred, it shall be with you as it would have been with the disciples, had they been willing to allow Christ to proceed on his journey, and who must therefore have missed the knowledge of his resurrection. But if, on the contrary, you manifest close attachment to your Heavenly Teacher, and are ready with the disciples to entreat him to be your guest in the house, as well as your companion by the way, he will do to you as he did to them, and as he promises to do to every man who opens when he knocks; he will enter in and sup with you, and make himself known in the breaking of bread. And thus is the scene before you virtually enacted again in all its main parts. The Saviour "makes as though he would go further;" but you constrain him to abide with you. You are not willing to allow him to depart; and this your successful urgency is but the result of the deep interest which you take in truths which you have already been taught. You press upon Christ and you obtain from Christ the going into the house and the tarrying with you, because you are able to say with the disciples—"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

But we must draw the parallel somewhat closer, so that every one may be able to take home to himself the great practical lesson. Observe the precise position in which the two disciples stood. They had heard a most admirable homily, but as yet they were ignorant of the most important truth of all—a truth for which the sermon of our Lord had been preparing their minds, but which it had not explicitly announced; and though they were, if we may use the expression, close upon this truth, they were also within a hair-breadth of missing it. Had they been too weary with their walk to importune for further converse, or had they thought that it would have been better to digest what they had heard than to demand more, Christ would have passed on, and they would have lost the privilege of the vouchsafed manifestation. It seemed to depend on their embracing the present opportunity, and not allowing it to slip, in hopes of presently obtaining another, whether or not they should be satisfied of the great truth of Christ's resurrection. They seized the opportunity, and they obtained the satisfaction; but they might have been remiss; they might not have urged their Instructor to stay, or they might have been content with his first refusal, and then, whatever after manifestation might have been vouchsafed—for of this we know nothing—they would evidently on this occasion have been deprived of acquaintance with the most glorious of facts. And here it is that the narrative should be most especially instructive to ourselves, setting forth a common danger and delivering a general warning. There are many, we are thoroughly persuaded, who often miss the manifestation of Christ through the indolently letting slip some presented opportunity; nay, we doubt whether there be any man who is brought within hearing of the gospel unto whom there have not been moments in which he has stood within the very threshold of the kingdom of heaven, in which it has depended on his immediately obeying some impulse or hearkening to some suggestion whether the door should fly open or remain closed against him. We might put it perhaps to the consciences of some amongst you, whether they have not known times when they have felt powerfully moved to the engaging in prayer, or to the reading the Bible, or to the breaking loose from evil habits; and we suspect there are but few, if any, who if honest in their answer will deny that they have had these seasons of Divine visitation; and we liken their arriving at such a point in moral experience to the arriving of the disciples at the village of Emmaus, where it was just put to their option whether they would take a higer lesson immediately, or defer that lesson to some more convenient season. The mind of the unconverted man, stirred through some secret instrumentality, has felt it proposed to it that it should take into its chambers a guest who might discipline the passions and remodel the character; but then it has been questioned whether the proposal should be instantly closed with, or longer time given for deliberation, and because the latter course has been adopted—because, that is, the disciples when at Emmaus have parted from their Teacher in the street, and gone alone into the house, the golden opportunity has been lost, and there has been no manifestation of Christ to the soul. You may not be thoroughly aware of it, but we should wish you to be assured, that religion is of such a nature that eternity is very frequently dependant on a moment. You can never be certain that an impulse will be repeated or a suggestion renewed; so that in parting from the Teacher who has awakened some serious emotion, in place of taking him with you into your dwelling, that the emotion may be deepened, you are perhaps letting go your last likelihood of salvation, and shutting yourselves up to indifference and impenitence. Wherefore is it that so little of permanent effect, for example, is wrought by the preaching which, while it lasts, fixes the attention and goes home to the conscience of a multitude? What is it, but that there is no immediate endeavour to deepen the impressions; and thus the very opportunity is lost, where the Redeemer stood ready to communicate himself? There is the very closest parallel between the case of the disciples and that of many amongst ourselves. When a sermon works upon men, as we are sure that it often works, with great disturbing force, producing uneasiness, through descriptions of sin and its consequences, and perhaps desire after acquaintance with Christ, through fervid setting forth of the work of mediation, there is this very close parallel, inasmuch as in both cases more than a human instructor has acted on the parties; preaching being an agency through which the Holy Ghost works, though they may not have been aware of the character of the agency; and in both cases the instructor has excited a warm interest in the truths on which he has enlarged. But here, it may be, the parallel ends, and the abrupt termination will often be the cause why the earnest listener to a sermon remains unconverted. When the sermon comes to a close, and thus the Spirit of God pauses in his instruction, the hearers may be said to reach the village of Emmaus, and each is about to enter his own house. And now the question is a question for whose decision we are bold to say that the Spirit of God waits. The question is, whether the work of Divine instruction shall terminate for the time, or whether what has been commenced and carried on in public shall be continued in private. Will you take the Teacher home with you, and sit down with him at once to an additional lesson, or will you leave him in the church, intending to return some few days hence, and expecting him to be again ready to discharge to you the office of Instructor? The effect of the sermon may have been to awaken serious thought and to prompt to resolutions of amendment, and we should say that you took the Teacher home with you, if you went straightway from hearing to reading the word, if you passed from public prayer to private, and if without giving time for the excited feelings to evaporate, you instantly entered on the correction of something which you knew to be wrong. And in like manner we should say, that you leave the Teacher behind you, or part from Him in the street of Emmaus, if, so soon as the sermon by which you have been wrought upon is completed, you take no pains to strengthen the impression, entering at once into frivolous conversation, deferring the acting on your convictions, and not turning to the Bible in hopes of again meeting your Heavenly Instructor. But upon the taking or the not taking home with you the Teacher, may depend your being converted or your remaining unconverted. This may just be the turning point, as it was with the disciples, when not yet certified as to Christ's resurrection. The pause is made, and the Teacher wants to see whether you will press for the continuance of his instructions, or whether you will show willingness to the having it interrupted and deferred. Only importune him to go out with you from the sanctuary, and to enter with you into the privacies of your dwelling, that there you may be better taught, and may henceforth act on the teaching, and we can almost answer that conviction will deepen into conversion, and that you will be gradually transformed into true servants of God, bearing the image of him who "died, and rose, and revived;" but if without an effort you suffer the Teacher to go on his way, not endeavouring to follow up the impression made through the public ministerings of the word, but returning as usual to worldly occupations, and dissipating serious thoughts by a hundred frivolities, what marvel that you are still practically strangers to the Saviour, and know nothing in the heart of the regenerating truth, that God hath indeed raised him from the dead? Ay, the scene in the street of Emmaus is continually acted over again—acted whenever there are persons in an audience whose hearts are made to burn through the preaching of the gospel. The Spirit of God has instructed these persons up to a certain point, and he is quite willing to instruct them further. He has opened to them portions of the Scriptures, and is ready to accompany them to their dwellings, that he may show them more of the truth that is in Jesus, and aid them in becoming acquainted with "the resurrection and the life;" but he will not enter uninvited—nay, he will not enter on a mere cold and formal invitation; he desires with our Lord to be constrained, that the importunity may prove sincere desire for his presence. This is his standing with you in the street, after having walked with you in the sanctuary, that he may see how you value instruction and are disposed towards its lessons. And if we are asked how it comes to pass, that out of a number of excited and rivetted listeners, who have heard with emotions of interest and delight the statements of scriptural truth which the preacher has put forth, there is not perhaps one who becomes in consequence a changed character—not one who is induced by what he has received to take up the cross and follow the Redeemer,—if we are asked for the reason of this, we have nothing to say in reply, but that there are pauses in the processes of spiritual instruction—pauses at which it is to be determined what love there is for truth, what disposition towards obedience—pauses at which it may be said, that the Divine Instructor "makes as though he would go further," and at which, therefore, it rests with the scholar either to detain him by his importunity or to alienate him by his indifference; and we have only to point to the disciples at Emmaus, who had listened eagerly to the discourses of the Redeemer, whom they supposed amongst the dead, but who would not have learned that he had burst the bonds of death, had they parted from him when there was a break in his teaching—had they not been so importunate to hear more from his lips—had they not literally constrained him to enter in, though the day was far spent. Yea, this explains how it comes to pass, that men whom a preacher has rivetted by his earnestness, startled by his descriptions of future punishment, or fascinated by his delineations of a heavenly state, relapse into indifference and continue in unbelief. They have taken no pains to carry on and to deepen the impression; they have not at once and earnestly prayed unto God for the broken and contrite heart; they have rather quieted conscience by some promise for the future, than been moved by its remonstrance to the immediate correction of their faults; and thus has all come to nothing, though, so far from having been indifferent or even inattentive listeners, they might be enabled with perfect truth to say—"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

Now, we have been somewhat diffuse in this explanation of our subject of discourse, because there is a nicety of correspondence between the circumstances of the disciples and those of many hearers of the gospel, which justifies our arrriving at the causes why preaching produces so little permanent effect. We wish to put you thoroughly into possession of a most important fact, namely, that it is not so much on what you feel during the progress of a sermon, as on what you do at the close of a sermon, that your being lastingly advantaged depends. The sermon may cause your hearts to burn; but this is only making the iron hot, and then it remains for you, according to a common saying, to strike when the iron is hot; for if you allow it to cool down, in place of shaping it into the required form, there is not only less opportunity for working up the metal, but you almost ensure the making it harder and less malleable than ever. We should like you, whenever you feel interested in a sermon, just to call to mind the circumstances of the disciples, when they reached the street of Emmaus, and consider that those circumstances are then virtually your own. The discourse which made you glow is at an end; but that Divine Agent who alone gives power to the preacher's words is not necessarily departing. The breaking up of the solemn assembly brings with it indeed the appearance of his making as though he would go further; but there is no real intention of leaving you, and the appearance is assumed merely to test your desire for its continuance. You are to see to it, then, that, as with Jacob wrestling with the angel, you do not let him go unless he first bless you. Observe that when you reach the end of the sermon you are virtually in the position of the disciples, when they reached the end of their journey. We would have you, then, set yourselves to the imitating the disciples, considering that the Divine Instructor only waits to be constrained, and that on your constraining him may depend your being made wise unto salvation. It might be that if you had the narrative before us in mind, and identified your circumstances with those of the two disciples, you would not venture to pass immediately from the solemnities of public worship to distracting and frivolous pursuits, but would, so soon as may be, retire into the privacies of the chamber, entreating the Heavenly Teacher to accompany you, and hoping to be yet further admitted into the mysteries of revelation. Not, however, that this is the only application of the incidents before us. You know how often it is spoken of as a fact in religious experience, that a season of depression succeeds to one of enjoyment, and a season of darkness to one of illumination; no doubt there are these alternations, and God, may give and then withhold the light of his countenance, in order that his people may learn their thorough dependence on himself, and ascertain from their suppression the value of blessings which unbroken possession might cause them to underrate. But, nevertheless, it may be that more rests with yourselves than is ordinarily supposed, and that God does not depart from you till you have shown a want of earnestness for retaining his presence. It may be that every departure is prefaced by what we may describe as the making as if he would have gone further, and that the departure does not take place until the appearance has failed to call from you manifestations of anxiety for more lengthened communion. When you have enjoyed great spiritual peace, the heart having burned within you at the disclosures of Divine faithfulness and love, and there have been signs as though the peace were about to be interrupted, it may be that you have failed to be importunate in prayer, that God would not take from you the consolations of his presence. The dove may often move the wing, as though about to take flight; but this is only to see whether you so wish it to remain that you will make some sacrifice to prevent its departure. And we cannot but think that Christians would escape many of those changes of which they so feelingly complain, and enjoy far more of unbroken fellowship with God, if they were watchful for such moments as those in the street of Emmaus—moments at which desertion seems likely to succeed to presence, or darkness to light, but which are really moments at which the Redeemer, having vouchsafed some rich manifestation, only waits to be importuned, that he may vouchsafe a yet richer. There is, we may believe, a succession in the Divine dealings with the soul; one discovery is intended to be introductory to another; and if the succession be interrupted, so that in place of light following light shadows often intervene, it may not so much be because God designedly suspends the emanations of his brightness, as because man, grown familiar with that brightness, takes for granted its continuance, or deprecates but coldly its cessation. They whom privileges make languid in prayer may justly expect to find their privileges diminished; but they, on the contrary, who pray the more fervently as their privileges increase, will find in every spiritual blessing the germ of a brighter. Let it, however, be observed from the instance of the disciples, that it is only by very earnest supplication that we may look to gain the continued presence of the Saviour. Their hearts, our text says, had burned within them, and therefore they were urgent for further instruction;

but the expression, "they constrained him," seems to mark, that they would not take a refusal, but reiterated their petition when he still "made as though he would have gone further." Had they been less importunate, had they been less easily disheartened, disposed to imagine that what was not granted immediately would not be granted finally, we may not doubt that Christ would have left them, and that thus they would have missed the tidings of his resurrection. And how much, in all probability, would Christians lose, through the being soon wearied out in prayer! It is to the importunate, to those who "pray without ceasing," that God promises blessings. Not that there is any virtue in the repeated petition, but that the continuing instant in supplication marks vehemence of desire and confidence in the Divine faithfulness; and God has been graciously pleased to ordain, that when these have been duly tried and proved, the entreated mercy shall not be withheld. Alas! for those who think that prayer is not heard, because the answer is not immediate, or not in the same form as the petition. They may be just reaching the point in importunity at which the answer is to come, when they give up in despair; or the answer may have come in a different shape, God knowing better than themselves what is for their good, and therefore disguising the sought blessing, so that when they receive it they know it not as what they asked. The prayer of a true Christian is never wholly fruitless, unless from his own want of fervour, or his own want of perseverance. God "waiteth to be gracious." This is one of the most beautiful scriptural declarations; but there are others which unreservedly require that we wait upon him. And there is a point at which, if we may use the expression, the one waiting satisfies the other: when we have waited so long that God will wait no longer, ere he manifest the graciousness which from the first he intended. I counsel you, then, to think, when tempted to leave off seeking for the blessing—to think how the disciples at Emmaus would have been parted from Christ, had they not actually constrained him to enter their abode. You may keep him with you, if you watch the symptoms of departure, and oppose it with your prayers; but he will not only "make as though he would go further"—he will actually leave you, if you only make as though you would detain him, in place of pleading with all the heart, and all the soul, and all the strength. Oh! the blessedness of all those who, having had him with them on the road to Emmaus, will not let him go when "the day is far spent!" It is only a "making as though he would go further." If as the shades of night gather he seem about to leave the believer to himself, he never deserts the death-beds of his followers, whatever apprehensions there may be, amid the throes and struggles of final departure, of the absence of that Good Shepherd who has promised his sheep that they shall never perish, and that none shall ever pluck them out of his hand. Then let prayer be earnest, and he will readily enter the chamber of the dying Christian, and be known to him as he was known to the disciples, in the breaking of bread, as the high mystery of his own death and passion is once more commemorated; and if darkness follow, and the dying man, feeble and failing, scarcely seem conscious of the presence of his Lord, then we can only say, that if, as with the disciples, the Lord have vanished out of sight, it is that he may appear in more glorious form, and welcome to paradise the disembodied soul. May God grant to all of us such a death-bed as that!

THE NECESSITY OF A PERFECT MODEL.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 28, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."—1 Peter ii. 21.

IN addressing you on saints' days I have generally endeavoured to direct attention to the character of the worthy whom the church has commemorated. I did so on the last recurrence of the festival of St. Simon and St. Jude; and as this is the last saint's day which will recur during the remaining short time of my ministering in this place, I will deviate from the practice. I will leave the example of saints and martyrs, and will show you Him whom our text describes as "leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." It is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ of whom the apostle uses these words. Christ has left us an example; the steps of Christ we are to follow. But of what use is it to propose to us so lofty a pattern? We can never succeed in the imitation: would it not, then, be better, less discouraging, to set before us some less perfect model, one whose excellencies we might perhaps hope to copy? This is the point on which we wish to employ our discourse. And we would first remind you of words which St. Paul uses in regard of certain ambitious and turbulent men in the Corinthian church:—"They measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." They judged themselves, you observe, by their immediate associates, and erected a standard of excellence which was relative rather than absolute. And this St. Paul condemns. If a man compare himself with others of his own family or neighbourhood, he may find reason to think himself the superior, and then he will be conscious of a kind of complacency, and exult in his relative greatness. But if, in place of confining himself to his own family or neighbourhood, he take the survey of other families and other neighbourhoods, and thus compare himself with a broader list of competitors, the likelihood is that he will find himself, though king in the small circle, yet outdone in the large, and thus shrink into insignificance, in place of winning distinction. And it is quite curious to observe how general is the habit of comparing ourselves among ourselves, and how necessary it is, in order to correct the consequent evil, that we take our standard from those that are above us. How constantly, for example, is a child thought very clever because more clever than others of his own family or village, whereas, when introduced into the sphere of a large public school, his intellectual powers procure him no distinction. And again, the lad who has stood high in a school, and outstripped his companions, will often disappoint the expectation of his friends when he enters into the higher competition of an university, showing that his parents had fallen into error in comparing him with none but his school-fellows, and forgotten that a giant among dwarfs may be nothing more than a dwarf among giants. The same holds good in cases that will suggest themselves to every one. A man is not necessarily the best orator who is most applauded at a parish meeting; and he who has ruled a vestry may be scarcely listened to in parliament. Or again, a man may reckon himself unrivalled as a poet, because he has fascinated a district, and gained the applause of all who have obtained a sight of his manuscript; and then, flushed with the idea that his genius will be readily acknowledged, he sends forth his volume to the world, and finds to his bitter disappointment that the world is not disposed to honour him with notice. His fault has been the comparing himself with his own circle—the forgetting that his friends were not necessarily judges of poetry, just because they had delivered the verdict in his favour. We might multiply these instances, but you will at once perceive the nature of the required illustration; and this is all we are anxious to exhibit. The general truth, and that to which every one must assent, is simply the truth that we do wrong if we conclude ourselves eminent because superior to our immediate associates; for undoubtedly the skill and knowledge which may be thought unrivalled in a village may be far excelled in a city: and those who are foremost in a city may be less than second-rate, when compared with the most distinguished in an empire; whilst even those who bear off the palm in an empire may be quite eclipsed when displayed on the broad theatre of a world. And hence we are bound to set before ourselves the very highest pattern which can anywhere be found of excellence in our object of pursuit, and to measure attainment by none but the loftiest standard. If we take a lower than the loftiest, it is evident that we may reckon ourselves at the summit, when we have made only inconsiderable progress. But of course it is especially of the concerns of religion that we have to speak. It must be in piety that we endeavour to show the need of a high standard. You will perceive at once, that nothing could be more fatal to piety than the introduction of the rule, that men should measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves. If it were enough that a man excelled those who who are immediately around him, virtue in many places would be immorality in others; he whose lot was cast in a profligate neighbourhood would have far less labour in winning a character for righteousness than one who was placed in a correct and well-ordered neighbourhood; whereas it cannot be doubted, that virtue and righteousness are immutable things, independent on the contingencies whether of place or of time. And again, you may observe, with regard to religion, that which passes for a high degree of attention to religion in one circle of society, would be considered as little better than indifference in another; so that a real Christian is a phrase to which various classes attach various significations. It cannot, therefore, be safe that a man should take his definition from his own immediate circle, seeing that a real Christian must be a real Christian everywhere, and yet, if we were to depend on human judgment, the real Christian in one place is hardly the real Christian in another; but when we turn to the Bible for direction, we find that we are not only forbidden to take our standard from amongst ourselves, but that, as in our text, the standard set before us is one at which attainment is impossible. The model proposed to us in Scripture, is our Saviour Jesus Christ, who "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Conformity to the image of the Redeemer is that which we are spoken of as predestinated to; and therefore, you observe, perfection must be the object at which we are to aim. We need not say, that compassed about as we are with infirmities, we can never look, whilst upon earth, to reach a state of sinlessness, but that whatever our advances, we must continue to the end far removed from perfection. To the last there will be opposition from within as well as from without, and the body of this death will keep down the aspirings of the soul, but nevertheless, though we cannot reach, we must strive after perfection; and thus we are to propose to ourselves a model, the following of which is altogether hopeless. And it is the wisdom of this arrangement which we wish to establish. It may be thought that the very hopelessness of success is enough to damp ardour, and that if the model were not altogether inimitable there would be more earnestness in attempting conformity. This is a point that deserves close attention, for there is much associated with it that is of prime importance in religion.

We shall, therefore, consider, in the first place, the evil consequences which would follow on our standard being one which might be reached; we shall, then, in the second place, endeavour to show that there is nothing to dishearten, but everything to encourage us in the fact, that Christ Jesus hath left us an example that we should follow his steps.

I. Now, it is worthy of observation, that in the public services of our church we offer petitions for the literal granting of which we can scarcely dare look. We desire of God, for example, "that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger;" and again, we beseech of him to "vouchsafe to keep us this day without sin;" but there is not one of us who will presume to say, that he ever passes a day without sin; at least, a man must be ignorant of what sin is, of the facility, the almost unconsciousness, with which it may be committed, a thought or a look sufficing for that transgression of law which is the Scriptural definition of sin, if he entertain the idea that he can be sinless through any one day, or even any one hour of his life. But, if we dare not anticipate the passing a day without sin, is it right that we ask what we are sure will not be granted, and thus prefer requests which exceed the bounds of all lawful expectation? Why, you are bound to consider that nothing short of sinlessness ought to satisfy a Christian; so that, if the prayer overpass the measure of his expectations, it does not overpass what must be the measure of his desires. It would argue the want of a real hatred of sin, and would therefore be highly dishonouring to God, to pray to be kept only from a certain degree of transgression, just as though any other degree might be allowed or overlooked. It would not be right to pray, "Vouchsafe to keep us this day without gross sin;" as though we should be satisfied if we offended only in what is thought little. We may not indeed expect to fall into no sin, but our Christianty can be nothing better than nominal, if we are content with avoiding this or that kind. But we will not content ourselves with vindicating the lawfulness of the petitions in question; our subject requires us to show the injury which would result from our using any other. Suppose that the church put into your mouths a more limited supplication, one of which we might have reason to expect that it would be literally granted: this would be setting up a lower standard of Christian desire, and narrowing the distinction between sins, in reference to the earnestness with which they should be shunned. And without representing all sins as of equal criminality, which we do not do, we may certainly affirm, that by accustoming ourselves to the distinguishing them into those which must be more diligently and those which may be less diligently shunned, we should soon come to the considering the one set as mortal, the other as venial; that is, we should soon reckon it safe to indulge our evil passions up to a point which we define for ourselves, and only dangerous when this limit is passed. And who shall measure the peril of making light of any one kind or any one degree of transgression, seeing that over and above the lurking love of sin which is hereby both shown and encouraged, if we begin to draw a line, we shall be constantly shifting it, throwing it further and further back, till nothing is forbidden but what does not meet our inclinations? Besides, we cannot be ignorant that humility is at the root of all Christian graces, and that what encourages pride is most injurious to piety. Suppose, then, we were required to imitate a pattern which might be equalled, and is it not certain that as the resemblance seemed to grow, we should feel increasing self-complacency? The fine result of copying an inimitable model is, that the vast distance at which we stand from perfection forbids our feeling proud of success. The advance appears nothing, when compared with the space which yet remains to be traversed. We are not sure that this could be affirmed in the case of the sculptor or the painter; but we are quite certain of its accuracy, when the matter in hand is the imitation of Christ. It may be that the thought of rivalling the model would not cause the chisel to be less exquisitely handled, or take delicacy from the strokes of the pencil; on the contrary, we can readily believe that the genius of the artist would be roused into new energy by each approach towards perfection, and that as the canvass glowed or the marble breathed with more of the life and the loveliness of the pattern, the rapture of success would produce nothing but greater study and earnestness. The artist might be proud of his progress, and yet his pride not necessarily interfere with his skill and his diligence. But the case is altogether different when it is a moral imitation at which a man has to labour. If he can ever be in such circumstances that he has reason to feel complacency at his success—and this might be the case if the thing imitated could be equalled—his endeavours will be paralysed in exact proportion as he thinks himself approaching perfection. Whilst human nature is what it is, we cannot succeed in imitating without feeling a degree of pride; and it is not possible that pride should be encouraged, without our going back in all that distinguishes a Christian. The pride which lights up the eye of the artist may only throw fire and genius into his touch; but when faith and love and self-denial are the features to be copied, pride will at once distort the outlines and deaden the colouring. There can be nothing clearer, than that if the great secret of spiritual advancement lie in the esteeming others better than ourselves, that advancement would be especially retarded by anything which fostered the notion of superiority; and yet this notion must be continually floating about, if we were to measure others by ourselves. Once erect an imperfect standard, and you make each Christian a criterion to which others are to bring their attainments; and thus in place of a general "pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ," you introduce the rivalry of an earthly competition, the substitution of relative for absolute excellence, and the considering oneself sufficiently advanced, if there be an apparent outstripping of this or that candidate. Oh! it is practically one of the most splendid things in Christianity, that it fixes our efforts on a model so immeasurably above us, that we have never time to calculate whether or not others are beneath us. We can never repose complacently on what we are; we must always find cause of humiliation in what we are not. We will survey a Christian, as he strives after perfection, and we will observe how everything of self-gratulation is repressed by the examples on which he fixes his gaze. It is possible that under the shadow of his own roof, or within the circle of his associates, there may be none who at all approaches him in faith and in devotion. If it were lawful that he judge himself by the Christianity of his own household or neighbourhood, he might be satisfied with his progress, and thus be exposed to all the evils which encompass a position which is favourable to pride; but his thoughts are on those who seem immeasurably before him, and not on those who may be a few steps behind him. The mighty worthies of other places and other days are beckoning him forward, and the great cloud of witnesses pours forth its forms. He compares his faith with that of Abraham, stretching his son upon the altar—with that of Daniel, daring the lion's den—with that of martyrs and confessors, counting not their lives dear, but witnessing for God in the face of persecution. And will he be disposed to admire his own faith, when his eye is on the heroes of Christian biography, as they brave all from which nature shrinks, and perform deeds which stagger a world by their boldness and magnificence? Or he compares his love with that of saints unto whom Christ has been "the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely"—with that of a Paul, who "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," or of a John, who had lived on his Master's bosom, and drew seraphic feelings from the resting place; and can he fail to be covered with shame at the coldness of his own affections, when he observes how others have, as it were, been wrapped up in the Saviour? Can he, with all this demonstration before him of the outgoings of heart which patriarchs and apostles felt towards God, be content, and yet more, elated, because perhaps his breast glows with a little more warmth than is found in the generality of a heart-frozen age? Yet this is not all. It is not the image of Abraham or of St. Paul to which conformity is to be sought; it is not even the devotedness of angels which is proposed as our model; the eternal Son of God, clothed in our nature, carrying that nature through every toil and every trial, with a faith which the contradiction of sinners could not shake—a love which was radiant under the hidings of God's countenance—a holiness which came out spotless from every struggle with the evil one, and a submissiveness which allowed no will but that of the Father,—here is the Exemplar of the Christian: oh! who can gaze on that, and think himself far advanced towards perfection?—the undefiled One in the midst of a sinful gathering, the unshaken One as there rolled against him a sea of tribulation—the Philanthropist, when scorn is given for love—the Benefactor, when there is blasphemy for thanksgiving—the Redeemer, when his own blood must be the purchase-money? Looking on this model, the only feeling which can occupy the mind must be one which sends us to a confession of deficiency. But suppose an opposite arrangement. In place of the unapproachable, let there be a standard which we are able to reach; and will it not follow, that as the man comes down from the high Exemplar of the Mediator, and takes his pattern from the feeble and imperfect, there will be an ever-growing danger of his pluming himself on his supposed progress in piety, and thus undermining by applauding his strength. He would not be kept humbled by the magnificence of his model, if set to imitate Abraham or Paul, for he might dwell on the faults of these worthies as well as on their excellencies, and the lower he was brought down the standard the greater risk that his onward step, because flattering to pride, would be quickly followed by a retrograde movement, which would throw him further off than ever from perfection; so that when the attainments of our own circle of Christian competitors were made to furnish the standard—when the only object of religious ambition was the outstripping the indolence of a certain church or community, there would be quickly introduced the petty jealousy of rivals, without any of the generous concurrence of soldiers beneath the same banner. A dwarfish if not a fictitious piety, would be all that could be found in an atmosphere congenial to self-flattery; and certainly all who beheld the disguised and dwindled Christianity would affirm of a society that had gone to its own ranks for a standard of excellence, that "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, they were not wise," and that it was indeed well for the Christian community that the example set before them was one which they may not hope to reach, seeing that it is Christ Jesus himself who hath "left us an example, that we should follow his steps."

II. We have to go somewhat further. You may say that whatever the evil consequences of erecting a low standard, there must be much that is disheartening in the copying a model which is confessedly inimitable. On the contrary, we argue, in the second place, that there is everything to encourage us in the fact that the standard cannot be reached; for it certainly is not essential to the suitableness of our example, that it is one whose excellence we may hope to overtake. This would be making our power of imitation, and not noble and beautiful qualities, the guide in selecting an example. It will not be questioned, that a faultless work of art, if such there could be, can be only the best model for an artist, and yet the artist may not expect to produce what is faultless. Why is there to be introduced any different rule into the nobler science of moral imitation? Encouragement will depend mainly on the probability of improvement; and this probability being greater with a perfect than with an imperfect model, it follows that we have more cause to feel encouraged in imitating Christ, whom we cannot reach, than one of our fellow-men, whom we might perhaps surpass. We admit, indeed, that if nothing short of absolute equality were of use, it would be destructive of all efforts to produce an inimitable model. Tell the Christian, when you set Christ before him as his pattern, that nothing will avail but the equalling the example, and the very perfectness of that example disheartens him, and he will give up as hopeless the imitative effort. Tell the painter that unless he clothe the canvass with Raphael's magnificence his works will be useless; or the orator, that if he reach not the sublimity of Demosthenes his oratory will have no worth, and the pencil drops from the hand of the one, and the tide of speech is arrested on the lips of the other. But there is no command to the Christian that he reach perfection—only that he strive after it diligently and unweariedly. Perfection is to be our object, but we shall not fail of everlasting happiness because we have not attained perfection, though the closer our approaches, the greater, we may believe, will be our blessedness, and hence the desirable model, the one which it is encouraging to study, is not that which we may expect to equal, but that in the copying of which we may find most improvement; and this is none other than the perfect model. What the painter seeks is improvement in painting; what the orator seeks is improvement in oratory, and therefore each is anxious to study the prime master in the art. What the Christian seeks is improvement in spiritual graces, and he will gain more from copying Christ, in whom those graces were perfect, than by imitating any saint in whom they were necessarily defective. I know indeed what you may urge in objection to our statement. You may tell us that our illustrations are at fault; that the painter and the orator cherish a secret hope of equalling their models, and that hence they have an encouragement which is not afforded to the Christian. Be it so. Visions of glory and pre-eminence may be floating before the student, and as he gazes down the vista of life he may fancy nations doing homage to the genius which flashed from his canvass, or electrified by the bursts of his eloquence. He may dream of being a rival to Raphael, for the thing is not impossible; he may imagine himself eclipsing Demosthenes, for there is nothing to prove that the Athenian can never be surpassed; but there is a confessed impossibility in the Christian's ever following his model. He is not, then, sustained as is the painter or the orator, by the hope, however vague, of reaching, if not exceeding the standard; and the want, you say, of this stimulus, forbids our illustrating the one case by the other. But even if we give up our position, that, improvement being the thing sought, there is more of encouragement in copying the perfect, than the imperfect. If we allow that thorough accuracy of resemblance ought not at least to appear hopeless, we can still plead for the advantageousness of our being set to imitate Christ. Accuracy of resemblance is not hopeless. It is not the dream of the young enthusiast, that in this moral imitation there may at last be absolute success. It is not the vision of the flushed and over-confident genius, that the rude mass of our nature may yet be moulded into the beauty and symmetry of the High Priest of our profession. "Beloved," said St. John, "now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." "Our conversation," exclaims St. Paul, "is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." And again: "We, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." "As, then, we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." So that as a Christian looks onward to the future, he has more to encourage him than the dim possibility which you appeal to as stimulating the painter or the orator.

His is the noble, the inspiring certainty, that however slowly, and however painfully goes forward now the imitative work, a day has to dawn, when, fashioned into perfect conformity to the model, he shall be presented unto God "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." He labours, therefore, as one who knows that his labour is "not in vain in the Lord." As he looks on the Lord Jesus Christ, presenting in his perfectness every grace which he himself is bidden to cultivate, he will feel that in this the introductory stage of his being he can attain nothing, whatever his strivings, which shall at all approach to the measure of the love, the zeal, the humility, the holiness of the Redeemer. He may obey to the utmost of his power, from the moment of conversion to the last moment of life, the injunction that we tread in the footsteps of Christ; and yet he must feel, when he comes to die, that there is an unmeasured separation between himself and his Lord. But he is not discouraged: he believes that the closer the resemblance attained whilst on earth to the Saviour, the brighter shall be his portion through eternity; and this belief keeps him ever on the alert, ever diligent to improve the aids of God's Spirit, to the heightening the yet feeble likeness; yea, and when most stricken with a sense of his deficiencies, most conscious of the unmeasured distance at which he stands, and must continue to stand from him who could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me," he is not disposed to give up in despair the copying what he longs, but to all appearance in vain to resemble. His faith looks forward to a season when, according to the words already quoted, Christ shall "change his vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body"—when the new creation, but just discernible amid the wreck and confusion of a morally disorganized world, shall rise up in its splendour and its perfectness, and when the image which here presented nothing but the outlines, shall exhibit each feature and wear each grace of the mighty original. Hence it is no hopeless attempt in which the Christian is bidden to engage. If indeed he were told that unless the imitation were perfect, unless he thoroughly succeeded in having completed in him that mind which was also in Christ, he must be rejected at the judgment, he might well at once give up in despair. If he were told that he cannot enter into heaven, unless whilst on earth the rude block is chiselled into all the symmetry and all the loveliness of the model, the more he gazed on Christ, the more he might admire, but the more might he be disposed to abandon the model. Taught, however, that a growing, though always imperfect resemblance, is the object and summit of present attainment, he will be continually and courageously occupied in fashioning the rough granite of his nature; and in the midst of his laborious statuary, when you might think him disheartened by surveying beauties which he cannot imitate, his mind springs onward to the consummation of all things, and gather fresh elasticity from the assurance, that "when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory." And can you imagine an arrangement by which more shall be done to stimulate and encourage! Oh! you might propose a defective pattern, and bid the Christian copy what he might perhaps surpass, and then there would be an encouragement, if such it can be called, in the blemishes of the original, and a stimulus in the prospect of superseding the model. But only let it be admitted that the improving thing is to study what is perfect, the cheering thing to know that by every approach towards excellence there is secured a fresh measure of excellence, the animating thing to have assurance that all shall at last bear the image which now overawes by its inimitable beauties, and you will rejoice in nothing more than the fact, that it is Christ himself whom we are commanded to copy. Yes, you will say of all who would plead for the advantages of a lower standard, the moral painters to whom a model is recommended by its imperfectness, that they prove themselves not wise. It is measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves; and you will make it matter of hearty and daily thanksgiving to God, that an apostle was inspired to declare of the Redeemer himself—"Leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps

We exhort you, then, in conclusion to the imitation of Christ, assuring you, that the more you strive to acquire the resemblance, the more will you make sure of your calling and election, and the more frequent and delightful will be your foretastes of the joys which shall hereafter be awarded to the faithful. It is not indeed by your own skill or by your own energy that you may look to effect conformity to Jesus; but by the Holy Ghost, that Divine Agent whose special office it is to renew man after the lost image of his Maker. For this you may pray; to his suggestions you may hearken; and everything that would grieve him you may sedulously shun; and he who thus seeks and improves the influences of God's Holy Spirit is just presenting, as it were, the canvass or the marble to the celestial artist; and the resemblance shall grow, even when he is most cast down at the poverty of the imitation. Again and again we say, the imitation must necessarily be poor. If the old nature were so destroyed in the renewed man, that there remained nothing of that moral disorganization which was consequent on the fall, we might expect, we might hope for the being made perfect on this side the grave; but since conversion is the introducing of a new principle, rather than the casting out of the old, the life of godliness must be what experience demonstrates it—an unceasing conflict; so that the Christian will have to exclaim with St. Paul, "I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Nevertheless, as we have just said, by giving ourselves up sedulously to the teachings of God's Spirit, we shall make progress in the desired resemblance by frequent contemplations of Jesus, of his devotion, his conformity to God, his zeal, his meekness, his patience, his charity, there will be excited the desire of being like him. This desire will express itself, through the aids of the Spirit, in earnest supplication, and supplication, bringing assistance from above, will be followed by unwearied endeavour, that heart, and hands, and eyes, and all our faculties, may grow up with the increase of God. "Wherefore," says the Apostle, "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds." Thus may the perfections of the Mediator lead us on towards heaven. In the words of Jeremy Taylor—"The excellence of thy sanctity, O Jesus, shining gloriously in every part of thy life, is like thy angel, the pillar of fire, which called thy children from the darkness of Egypt!" Oh! that the gaze of every one of us may be upon Christ! Looking unto him, we shall be made like him; and "to them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 4, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."—Daniel vi. 23.

The narrative of the casting of Daniel into the lion's den is one of those with which we grow familiar in infancy, and whose interest continues when we reach riper years. Whether we consider the conduct and preservation of Daniel, or the malice and punishment of his enemies, the record yields to none in the Bible in the material which is furnished for profitable thought. In proposing to engage you this day with a review of this history, we are aware we can expect to say nothing which would not suggest itself to your minds. The reflections which the history should produce are so obvious, the lessons which it furnishes so simple and evident, that even children to whom Daniel in the lion's den is a most engaging tale, may anticipate the minister in what he has to say. Yet this does not dissuade us from selecting such a topic of discourse; there will be a pleasure in feeling that there is a thorough unanimity between the speaker and the hearers, and there may be as much profit in awakening thoughts which slumber in the mind as in suggesting others which have never before entered. The sound of well-remembered music is often a thousand fold more touching and startling than of that which is heard for the first time, even though richer in melody; and so may the repetition of truth have a greater moral energy than the statement of new, though in itself more commanding. We shall make it, therefore, our business to give little more than a running commentary on the narrative in question, dwelling, of course, at greatest length on such points as present what is most interesting and instructive, till we conduct you to the wondrous result stated in our text: "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."

Now, it had been predicted by Isaiah, when denouncing the sin committed by Hezekiah, in receiving the messengers from Babylon, that the days would come when the children of the seed royal should be eunuchs in the palace of the proud monarch of the East. Accordingly, when Nebuchadnezzar had besieged and taken Jerusalem, he commanded that the children of the seed royal should be carried to Babylon, and should be taught there the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. Amongst those transported in obedience to this command, were Daniel and those three youths who afterwards became illustrious by refusing to worship the golden image, and by their preservation in the midst of the fiery furnace. But God's eye was upon Daniel, as it had been upon Joseph, when carried to a strange land, and, giving him, as to Jacob's son, skill in the interpretation of dreams, he caused him to rise to distinction in the empire. So great and so firm did his reputation become, though he was a foreigner and a captive, that even when Babylon was taken by the Medes, he did not lose his high rank in the kingdom. But Daniel soon found how eminence excites enmity, and how impossible it is to be unmolested in greatness. Perhaps in this case there were other motives besides envy. They who caballed against Daniel found their schemes thwarted by his integrity, for Daniel was distinguished by honesty and independence. We may believe him to have been that often though rare instance of a public man who was as disinterested as incorruptible in the service of his God, who could neither soil his own fingers with a bribe, nor sully his soul by winking at it in another. But a real patriot is a standing rebuke on the herd of the fictitious. His loftiness of purpose galls and cows them in their self-interested projects, and though we have no direct account that the associates of Daniel were unfaithful to the king, and sought only to enrich themselves at his expense, still, when we find them so little scrupulous as to the means of getting rid of an upright colleague, there is nothing either improbable or uncharitable in the supposition that Daniel was a check upon evil practices, and obnoxious, because his example reproved peculation. But it was one thing to desire to be freed from the presence of a too righteous colleague, and another to effect the removal of one who stood high in royal favour, and in whose character even slander could not detect a flaw. There was never a higher compliment paid to the integrity of an individual than was forced from the enemies of Daniel in their plottings against him. They sought diligently to find ground of accusation concerning him, but they were at length compelled to say, "We shall find no occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." Now, did these presidents and princes sit in secret debate on the framing a law which Daniel would be certain to break, and which nevertheless Darius might be tempted to pass. It might have seemed difficult to secure both these points, but they knew, that on the one hand they had to deal with an invincible constancy; and on the other, with a ruler accustomed to flattery; and with these elements to guide their guilty legislation they needed only boldness to insure success. The decree, as you all know, which they proposed to Darius, was, that if any man for the space of thirty days should ask any petition of God or man, except Darius, he should be cast into the den of lions. And what did Daniel, when he knew that the writing was signed, and knew also, as he surely did, that his own destruction was aimed at by so strange an enactment? His enemies were well informed as to what his customs were, and they were confident that one so zealous and conscientious in the duties of religion would not be frightened from his habits by the fear of the lion's den. Shall he disappoint them? No; his circumstances are peculiar, and what might have been prudence in another, would have been cowardice in him. It had been his known custom to retire to his chamber three times a-day, and with his window open, as though for freer intercourse with heaven, and his face towards Jerusalem, the city of his fathers, where God had promised especially to dwell, to present on his knees his thanksgivings and his prayers; and his enemies had framed their law on their knowledge of this custom. Had Daniel's devotions been altogether private, they would doubtless have devised another kind of edict; but Daniel had been accustomed to give what was almost a public testimony of his own faith, and a public protest against the idolatries of Babylon; and if he had now changed his course to meet the present exigence, there would have been ground of accusing him of inconsistency and faint-heartedness, and the framers of the iniquitous law, if they had failed in gaining the evidence which was to cast Daniel into the lion's den, might have succeeded in defaming him as a time-server, and bringing reproach upon his religion. But Daniel was not to be daunted. He felt the case to be one in which boldness and not concealment befitted him as the prophet of Jehovah. He therefore adhered rigidly to his custom, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. There is something very beautiful in this statement; he had given thanks as well as prayed in the days of his prosperity, and he ceased not to combine the two when threatened with calamity. Yes, he gave thanks in the very face of the lion's den, and with the certainty before him that he should be speedily cast into that fearful abode. He rejoiced, it may be, that God thought him worthy to suffer for his name, and having first been earnest in prayer that he might be strengthened for the trial, he felt his spirit so elated that he could glory in tribulation.

And now his enemies, watchful in the carrying on their murderous design, approach his dwelling, and find him on his knees. Immediately they denounce him to the king, and in the most contemptuous language: "That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed." Darius at once perceived the grievous folly he had committed, and was sore displeased with himself for having brought into peril the most excellent of his servants. He now saw the plot to which he had inadvertently lent himself, and laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver Daniel. In vain—the law was irrevocable, and the presidents and princes, as though they had the thirst of the bloodhound, were vehement in demanding that it should be put into execution. And now must Daniel be brought to surrender, as was Jesus in later days, to the will of his enemies. Imagine with what an air of triumph those who had plotted his destruction must have surveyed him when thus caught in their toils. How they must have congratulated each the other on the success of their machinations. But Daniel seems to have maintained a dignified silence. He was communing with his God, and he had neither the time nor the inclination to reproach those who had done him foul wrong. The king, indeed, addressed him with words of encouragement, declaring that the God whom he served continually would deliver him. But, certainly, those words deserved no reply, for, whatever their truth, Darius had no right, whilst committing a crime, to calculate on a Divine interference which should prevent its effects. The command is given; Daniel is cast into the lion's den, and a great stone is laid on the mouth, as though to preclude the possibility of escape. Thus, to all appearance, is the prophet destroyed. There seemed no reason for doubting that he must have quickly perished; and his enemies went away, we may believe, to their revels, as though villainy had been virtue, and there had been no God in heaven. Not so the king, Darius. Conscious of the gross injustice of which he had been guilty, and still cherishing a vague hope that Daniel would be saved, he went indeed to his palace, but not to enjoy its luxuries, for he passed the night fasting, and his sleep went from him. He refused to be soothed by instruments of music. There is no power in the richest melody to lull an unquiet conscience, and sleep is most effectually scared by images with which our own guiltiness causes it to be haunted. How different the night which Daniel passed in his wild cavern from that spent by Darius in his splendid abode! We will not say whether the prophet were confident, when cast to the lions, that God would put a restraint on the ferocious beasts, and forbid them to do him harm; we know not whether he had been favoured with a distinct revelation, assuring him of escape from what seemed certain death; but at all events, we can feel, that when he found himself amongst the monsters, and saw that in place of obeying the impulses of their nature they flocked around him playfully,—as though Isaiah's prediction were accomplished—"A little child shall lead them, and they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain;" oh! we can feel that amazement must have been mingled with delight, and that the man of God must have sung as rapturous praises as were ever called forth by a wonder-working Providence. The emotions of Jonah, when cast into his living sepulchre, must have been such as it were not easy to describe; but in his case there was remorse, as well as gratitude, for disobedience had brought him into the peril from which he was thus strangely delivered. But with Daniel there was no cause for self-reproach, and nothing of sorrow, unless for the wickedness of his enemies, could have had place in his breast, as he lay down to sleep side by side with the ravenous; and he slept, it may be, soundly and peacefully, curtained by guardian angels, though stretched on the most fearful of couches. There may have been glorious and blessed dreams vouchsafed to him in this night of wonders; whilst the gorgeous chamber of Darius was peopled by stern imagery which drove away slumber, the den of lions may have seemed crowded with beautiful forms, whispering of gladness.

At length morning dawned, and with its first streak the disquieted monarch hastened to the den. It is very hard to say on what principle Darius, himself not a worshipper of Jehovah, expected the miraculous preservation of Daniel. He was probably familiar with the history of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and knowing that Daniel served the same God, and was equally innocent, he might hope that he would be the subject of a like miraculous deliverance. He stands at the den's mouth, indulging a hope, but almost fearing to call to the prophet, lest he should be answered only by the silence of death, or the roar of infuriated beasts. At length—as though the worst calamity were better than suspense—he cried, we are told, with a lamentable voice, and demanded whether the God that Daniel served had indeed been able to deliver him from the lions. We will not attempt to tell you what his feelings must have been when the sound of a human voice came forth in reply. At first he may have thought it was but the echo of his own, and painfully he may have listened, fearing to trust his senses, lest they should cheat him into belief. But soon there could be no room for doubt. It was the prophet's voice; the well-remembered tones could not be mistaken. The clear and thrilling words, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions mouths," assured the monarch that what he had scarce dared to hope was indeed brought to pass. Then there was the command quickly given and rapidly executed, that Daniel should be taken from the den; and the man of God, on whom the grave was thought to have closed, stood forth with no manner of hurt—a type of the resurrection, a monument of the power of faith—and this very thing came to pass, exactly as it is recorded in our text: "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."

Now, the lessons, my brethren, which this narrative furnishes, reduce themselves under two divisions—the example set by Daniel, and the protection afforded by God.

We point you to the prophet, as presenting a pattern of that open profession of religion which is demanded from ourselves as the disciples of Christ. You cannot imagine circumstances in which a man might have made a more plausible excuse for confining religion within his own heart, and not allowing it to be made manifest to his fellows. How readily, and with what seeming fairness, might Daniel have argued that prayer was exactly that which demanded and flourished in privacy; so that the decree of Darius was most convenient, for God might still be served, and the king not openly disobeyed. But in confessing boldly his God, Daniel set a noble example to the men of every after generation. It is in this that he preaches to ourselves, whose temptation to the hiding religion can never be the thousandth part of his. With us it is not whether we shall confess Christ in the face of a den of lions, but whether we shall confess him at the risk of a sneer, or the loss of some advantage, or the rupture of some friendship. We would not, indeed, disparage the trial to which in our own day the righteous are exposed; we would never confine martyrdom to seasons in which persecution hath lit up its fires, as though it were not quite possible that in quieter times, when the surface of society is unruffled, there might be carried on a system of insult and injury which would demand in the assaulted party as much of patient heroism as would go to the upholding a confessor at the stake. We are always ready frankly to admit, that it is no slight courage in religion which is not vanquished by a laugh, and that the man who can maintain his consistency, and be firm in his duty in the teeth of a supercilious contempt or a cutting ridicule, exhibits the elements of a character which would not be quailed had the sword been unsheathed to hew down the saints. But, nevertheless, it cannot be said, that in any given instance our temptation to compromise or concealment approaches in any sense that by which Daniel was assaulted. We can never pretend that we have as certain a peril to encounter, and as specious a way of escape, as were presented to the prophet whose history we have reviewed; and yet with what timidity, or rather, with what cowardice we maintain for the most part our Christian profession. That "fear of man" which "bringeth a snare" is apt to repress our energies, when there is most call for their exercise, and we suffer ourselves to be betrayed, if not into a sinful compliance, yet into a yielding assent, that does an injury not to be calculated to the cause of religion. We look with necessary suspicion on the profession of Christianity which has a marvellous adroitness in conforming itself to existing circumstances and companies, which can be fluent whilst all around are sure to agree, but grows silent when there is likelihood of opposition or dislike. Indeed, it is very possible that much harm might be done by injudiciously obtruding our religious sentiments upon others; and this requires us to weigh well the precept of our Saviour, that we cast not our pearls before swine. But for one instance in which there is danger of being too forward, there are a thousand in which there is danger of our being too remiss. We believe that we may wait many days before silence is a duty, and perhaps not one before it is a crime. And without dwelling on the case of the reproof of vice and the statement of truth, we may affirm generally, that the temptation to which Christians are most exposed, and to which they most yield, is the temptation, if we may so express it, of keeping their religion to themselves, or of hiding it from those whom it is likely to offend. The dread of being thought singular, the fear of alienating by over-preciseness parties whom on every account they most wish to conciliate—the possible injury which may be done them in their worldly affairs, by men who would be disgusted by the intrusion of their piety—the likelihood of their being compelled to forego some advantage or association, if they bear prominently their religious character in the intercourse of life; these—and judge ye by your own experience whether we exaggerate or misrepresent—these too often make cowards of Christians, inducing them to do what the lion's den, with all its terrors, could not compel Daniel to do—cover up godliness, as a thing to be ashamed of, and keep for the solitude what was meant equally for the crowd. There are no words of Christ which more deserve to be pondered, especially in days when charity is supposed to require the obliteration of differences, than those in which he demands from us a public confession. "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." It is, you observe, the confession before men and the denial before men to which consequences of such magnitude are ascribed; and for our own part we know not how Christ can be confessed before men, if religion be shown only where likely to be popular, nor how denied before men, if not by our shrinking from acknowledging ourselves as friends, because surrounded by his enemies. We press upon you, then, the example of Daniel, as worthy to be remembered, whenever you are tempted to conceal your religion. It is a temptation of frequent recurrence—the more frequent in proportion as you mix much with men, and are brought into contact with different classes. In one case your religion may expose you to contempt, in another to dislike, in a third to positive injury, according to the character of the parties before whom you avouch it, and their circumstances relatively to yourselves; but in every case you may strengthen yourselves for confession, by calling to mind how the prophet of the Lord held fast his allegiance in the worst hour of peril. There was no wavering, no flinching, no computing how far he might retreat without turning traitor; he only felt that the time was come in which God might be honoured by his constancy. Shall he labour in bringing himself to determine whether he may not bear down without surrendering his profession, and avert danger without reaching apostacy? Rather, shall he not make it his labour and prayer, that he may in this extremity walk worthy of his vocation, and bring no disgrace on the religion of his fathers? Thus did Daniel, and thus should we do, whenever tempted to screen ourselves from peril by concealing truth or compromising principle. And if it seem hard to us to acknowledge ourselves disciples of Christ, when the acknowledgment may expose us to insult, provoke hostility, or deprive us of some temporal advantage, let us transport ourselves in thought to Babylon, when the decree was issued for the suspension of prayer. Yes, if it ever appear to us a sufficient excuse for disguise—a justifiable apology for our keeping our sentiments to ourselves, that the open avowal of love towards God and reverence for his laws may occasion us much inconvenience, and perhaps much actual injury, let us remember, and then be dastards, if we can, that it was when the writing was signed, that Daniel went into his house, and knelt upon his knees, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God.

But the history in question, does more than present us with an example; it furnishes an encouragement, as recording the protection which God afforded to the prophet. We should have had the same cause for admiring the heroism of Daniel, and we might equally have proposed him as a pattern to ourselves, had he perished in the lion's den, in place of being the subject of a miraculous deliverance. We should have heard, no doubt, that God had taken to himself his bold and faithful servant, and abundantly rewarded his constancy and his sufferings; but the history would then have wanted its great charm, and it would not have proved the watchfulness of God over his people, nor have shown that in every sense, a conscientious course is the safest. It is in these respects, that the record is most valuable. Again and again we turn to it and draw encouragement for the performance of duty. If Daniel had acted with what the world would have called prudence—if he had withdrawn himself from observation, till the thirty days were expired, he might, or he might not, have escaped the lion's den. But we can all perceive that his cowardice would have brought upon him a scorn and reproach, which would have caused him to gain very little by escape. And if we could say nothing more than this, there would be abundant ground for our arguing from the prophet's case to our own, and inferring the advantage which always attends a manly and unflinching avowal of our principles. We may be sure that the likelihood is far greater of sinking in men's opinion and provoking their contempt and dislike, if we basely desert, than if we boldly sustain our profession. The world is thoroughly aware that there ought to be consistency; it looks for consistency, and to a certain extent it admires, it respects consistency. The coward, of whatever description, is an object of scorn; whereas, there is a kind of reverence for bravery, even when men are inclined to wish it a better cause. When a man has once declared himself the disciple of Christ, the world expects him to act up to the declaration; and though it may despise his principles, and hate his preciseness, it will think the worse of him, in proportion as he seems ashamed of his religion, and the better as he is firm in its maintenance and its display. So that if you consulted only what was politic, you should make it your endeavour to imitate Daniel, and be constant as he was in avowing his principles. In almost every situation in which we can be placed, there are observers who know well what we profess, and who also know well how we ought to act. They know we have taken into our hands the banner of religion, and that we ought not to furl it just because an enemy is in sight; and if they perceive that we have ostentatiously displayed the ensign, when all has been peace, and suffer it to drop when there are the lowerings of war, you may be sure they will treat us as they would dastards on the battle-field, who forsake their colours, when they should grasp them to the death. We cannot believe that men ever gained any portion of esteem by that deference to prejudice which leads to the keeping back truth; but we know with certainty, that in a variety of cases, the manly, yet unassuming avowal of religion commands respect, even if it do not disarm enmity.

But we gather still greater encouragement from the history of Daniel; we not only infer that it would be our policy, were there nothing higher to be thought of, to be consistent in religion; we learn also that where there is consistency on our part, there will be protection upon God's. The duty of the prophet was clear; the king's edict might be imperative; the lion's den might be fearful; but it was his business to obey God rather than man, and leave to the Almighty the avenging of his wrongs; and therefore does he open his windows and offer his petitions in thorough assurance that he was keeping the Divine law, and in thorough confidence that he should therefore receive Divine succour. I do not say the example is always to be literally followed. There is a prudence as well as a valour demanded from the servants of God; and since prayer may be privately offered, so as to be known only to Him to whom it is addressed, the Christian may sometimes bow to the storm, and confine his worship, for a time, to his own breast. It is not always our duty to brave persecution; sometimes it is our duty to avoid persecution. "When they shall persecute you in one city," said Christ to his disciples, "flee ye to another." A plain intimation that discretion must be exercised as well as courage, and that flying from evil as well as facing it, may become those who take God for their hope. But, as we before said, the circumstances of Daniel were peculiar. What would have been prudence in another would have been cowardice in him; therefore did he brave the decree, in thorough confidence of receiving help from above. Neither was he disappointed in this his expectation. Things were, indeed, permitted to reach an extremity—his enemies found him on his knees, the king sought in vain to deliver him, the den was opened, the victim of injustice was thrown to the lions; but just then, when to all human appearance rescue was hopeless, just then God mightily interposed, defeated the machinations of the wicked, and placed his servant in safety. Who, after this, will fear to trust himself to the Lord, even if duty can be performed only at the risk of loss or inconvenience? Be it so, that if we would serve our God boldly and faithfully, we must peril reputation, or substance, or life. At least we serve a Being who, if he see fit, can secure our deliverance, and who, if he permit an injury, will give a thousand-fold more than equivalent. If we must enter the lion's den, he can send his angel to shut the lions' mouths; and if he put no restraint on the ravenous beasts, we can still reckon that the "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." And the experience of believers in every age of the church has been but a counterpart of that of Daniel; so that the prophet is one of a cloud of witnesses, testifying to the power of faith, and the carefulness of the Almighty to make good his promises. The followers of Christ have been exposed to one kind or another of difficulty or persecution, and have, therefore, had cause to exclaim with the Psalmist, "My soul is among lions." They have even been so beset by fierce and malignant opponents, that they could adopt as their own, the words of St. Paul, when he declares of himself, that "after the manner of men he fought with beasts at Ephesus." But is there a solitary instance to be produced in which, though God has been trusted, man has been deserted? Does the case of Daniel stand alone without parallel, either before or since its occurrence? Alone it may stand in the marvel of its incidents, and the miracle of its deliverance; and regarded as a demonstration how God can suit his succours to the exigence, it is but one of an innumerable throng which every day and every hour is only helping to swell. We must be deaf to the voice which rolls in upon us from the haunts of the living and the homes of the dead, if we doubt whether the Almighty God is a strong tower to them that commit themselves to him. I know that the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour; but I know also if we face the lion as did Daniel, the promise will be verified: "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you." I know that like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, the wicked man will lie in wait and seek to destroy; but I know also, that the wicked man can do nothing except as God permits, and that there is a promise to such as make God their portion: "Thou shalt tread on the lion and the adder." I know that there is a pit into which we must descend, and that the devourer of the nations reigns there insatiable; the grave gloomier than the den of lions into which Daniel was cast; the territory of death which remains as ravenous as ever, though generation upon generation has been given as its prey—this must be entered, without exception, by all. But Daniel is to me a type of the resurrection. Yea, I could almost call him a type of the Redeemer, who is emphatically "the Resurrection and the Life." He went down, as did Christ, to the lower parts of the earth, the wicked men having prevailed against him, and triumphing in his destruction; and the stone was rolled to the mouth of the cave, the king and the lords sealed it with their signets; as did the chief priests and pharisees when the Saviour was entombed; but the prophet, like the Mediator, came forth without seeing corruption. Both met the Conqueror in his own abode, and both left him vanquished in the moment of apparent victory. And as Daniel rose uninjured from the lion's den, so shall all who imitate his constancy and trust in him whom he would seem to have typified, rise gloriously at last from the sepulchre; and there shall have passed upon them no manner of hurt, and their righteousness shall be vindicated in the face of every enemy. And there is something more to complete the parallel. So as soon as Daniel was delivered, Darius commanded his accusers to be brought, and their wives and children, and cast to the monsters who had reverenced the prophet. The lions, we read, had the mastery of them, "and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den." And thus, at last, whilst the righteous are delivered, the inveterate foes of religion must be bound hand and foot and cast to that second death, from which, alas—comes no deliverance! We can only add an earnest prayer, that when that last day breaks on this creation, when the lion of the tribe of Judah shall acknowledge his friends and scatter his enemies—we may be found to have followed the example, that so we may have a share in the triumph of Daniel.

THE GOSPEL NET.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 11, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."—Matt. iv. 19.

THESE words, as you may remember, were addressed by our blessed Redeemer to Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother, whom he had found "casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers." It was very natural that in summoning these men to be his disciples, and to engage in the preaching of his gospel, our Lord should employ language adapted to their profession. Accustomed to fishing, they were not so much to give up their occupation as to pursue it in a new scene, and on new objects. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." But whilst this is sufficiently obvious, we may well think that more was intended by our Lord than a mere passing allusion to the worldly calling of those whom he addressed. When, in another place he calls himself the Good Shepherd, do you not at once feel that there is a double reference in the description—a reference to men as sheep, as well as to himself as the Shepherd? The image is suggestive as well as descriptive. Whilst it delineates Christ with all the care and tenderness of a shepherd, it delineates men with all the waywardness and helplessness of sheep; and any discourse on the alleged character of the Saviour would be bald and imperfect if it did not extend itself to the implied character of the sinner. And thus also with regard to our text. If the apostles are to be styled "fishers of men," then there is evidently suggested to us the patience and the skill which those who seek to save souls should display, like anglers plying their work assiduously, and baiting the hook variously according to varieties in the fish which they desire to take; there is further suggested that the gospel itself—for this it is with which the fishers are to fish—must have some resemblance to the implement with which, on the river or in the sea, the fisherman plies his occupation. If the preacher be a fisher, then the gospel must be a net; just as if the Redeemer be a Shepherd, then the church must be regarded as the sheep. And this, as you will remember, is verified by one of the parables of our Lord, so that it has something better to rest upon than supposition or inference, for Christ expressly likens the kingdom of heaven—that is, God's Divine dealings with men under the gospel dispensation—to a net. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." So that if we work out in full the simile adopted in our text—if, that is, from finding preachers called fishers, we deal with the visible church as with that into which men of different classes and characters are swept as a net—we shall only be keeping up the scriptural imagery, and employing illustrations which our Lord himself furnished. Come, then, take your stand by the sea of Galilee; we have to present to you the gospel under an aspect with which you are, perhaps, hardly familiar. Listen to the terms in which the Saviour is calling to those men to abandon their boat and their trade; and let us see what is to be learned as to the gospel itself from his employing these peculiar words: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Now, we shall, of course, make frequent reference to the parable which we have already quoted, for this parable is our warrant for the supposition, that if the preacher be a fisher, the gospel which he preaches, in other words, that with which he fishes, may be like unto a net. And here it is worth your observing, that the word employed by our Lord in likening the kingdom of heaven to a net is one which denotes a larger and more powerful implement than is ordinarily understood by the expression. If the net were such as to extend from one side to another of a piece of water, and at the same time to reach the bottom, so that being forced along it would necessarily enclose whatsoever fish there were, and allow none to escape, it would be of the kind which the word here employed must be understood to denote. With such a net as is here meant, and indeed we might say, with any kind of net, it is not at all in the power of the fisherman to secure only the good fish to the exclusion of the bad. He must gather promiscuously, whatever the separation which he afterwards attempts. If he could ascertain beforehand, that there is only this or that species of fish in the water, through which his net is to sweep, he might, of course, determine that he would not encumber himself with aught that is worthless. But, since this is wholly beyond his power, he can only proceed diligently with his occupation, doubtful whether what he is bringing to shore will be of any value, but persevering in hope, and determining that when he can look upon the draught, he will separate the good from the bad. And when you pass from the figure to that which it represents, you are diligently to bear in mind this inability of the fisherman to exclude the bad fish from his net. The kingdom of heaven, or Christianity, as introduced into the world, and to be propagated therein, resembles a spacious, all comprehensive net, which will necessarily include bad as well as good. The ministers of Christianity, the "fishers of men," those who are ordained of Christ to the admitting members into his church, must be regarded as entrusted with this net, and commissioned to throw it into the waters of the world. Then, these "fishers of men," have no power of providing that there shall be no mixture of nominal with vital Christianity, or that all whom they receive into the visible church shall have fellowship equally with the invisible church. Nay, and it yet further follows that it is no part of their office to attempt excluding the worthless from their net. The province as well as the ability of the spiritual fisher, like that of the natural, is confined to the using an instrument of which the workings are concealed. He must let down the net, but until the net is brought to shore he has no power of knowing what kinds of fish he has enclosed. Such power is taken from him by the very nature of his occupation, and yet more in the case under review by the nature of the implement with which he has to work. We hardly know how it can be thought consistent with such scriptural representations as these, that it should be reckoned a part of Christian duty to endeavour to provide that none but the good should be received into the church; and nothing else but godly jealousy to refuse admission where we have no proofs of excellence. Suppose it once admitted that the ministers of Christianity are to ascertain by rigid examination the characters of all candidates for admission into the church, and what resemblance is there between their office and that of the fisher who must catch the fish before he can know what it is, and not know what it is before he lets it into his net? Suppose, for example, that infant baptism were unlawful, that none ought to be received into membership with the visible church but such as are able to give a satisfactory account of their faith; and what becomes of casting the net in perfect ignorance as to what it may enclose? If you remember that admission into the church is effected through baptism, you can hardly fail to observe a special propriety in such imagery as that which is now under review. It is almost literally the letting down of the net into the deep, and the enclosing what may be moving about therein. If the visible church gather none within its circles but those whom it finds in the waters of baptism; and if those who have the management of the net have nothing to do but to move it through the waters; does it not seem to follow that the "fishers of men," those who have the superintendence of the visible church, are limited as to their office to the administering the sacrament of baptism, and are not required, nay, not permitted, to exclude all such candidates as cannot yet give an account of their faith? If it be wrong to admit infants into the church, it must be wrong because we are necessarily ignorant whether those infants will be ever real believers in Christ. But if ignorance such as this is to warrant us in exercising the power of exclusion, we know not how the visible church can be likened to a net, which from its very nature gathers of all kinds alike, and by that very nature prevents those who use it from knowing what kinds they enclose. So that whatever may have been the reasons—for of these we do not now treat—we learn that it is a distinct appointment of God, and not a mere consequence of human judgment, that bad and good gain admission to the visible church. You learn this even more distinctly when the kingdom of heaven is likened to a net, than when you read the well known parable of the tares and the wheat; for it might have been supposed from that parable, that the mixture was owing to the negligence of those who had to watch the field, seeing it was expressly said, that it was while men slept that the enemy came and sowed the tares among the wheat. Greater vigilance, it might have been imagined, would have prevented the approach of the enemy, so that it might still have been thought contrary to the will of God, that real Christianity and nominal should be mingled in the church. But when you read of the net which, from its very construction, no regard being had to the skill or industry of the fisherman—from its very construction would necessarily include every kind of fish, every kind, that is, that moved in the waters into which it was cast; you have the Christian church presented to you, as both designed and adapted for the collecting of all sorts of persons; so that there is a mixture, not through the carelessness of those who have to regulate the admission, but through the will and appointment of the Lord God Almighty. God, we may say, never designed that under the present dispensation, there should be what may be called a pure visible church—a visible church that should have no members but such as belonged equally to the invisible. It is not through want of circumspection in admission, nay, not through want of severity in excommunication, that a Christian community includes members who are strangers to practical Christianity; it is because God, for wise ends, has determined and ordered that the nominal should be outwardly with the real, reserving to himself the making a final separation, when the season of retribution shall succeed to the season of trial. And therefore, whatever our desire for the spread of real godliness in the church, and whatever our longings for the time when all who profess themselves Christians shall give their heart to Christ; we find nothing in the present mixture of bad and good but the accomplishment of most distinct prophecy, nothing but the result of a Divine appointment which was not to be altered by any human carefulness. There is something beautiful in the thought of a thoroughly pure church—a church which should give the name of Christianity to none who are not Christ's in sincerity and truth; but such a church is not intended to exist under the present dispensation, throughout which, as we learn from that other parable, wheat and tares are to grow together. And if any set of men were to tell us that they had succeeded in forming such a church—that by the rigid tests which they had instituted, and the earnest scrutiny which was constantly maintained, they had secured their membership against the being defiled by aught of vice and hypocrisy;

and if they were then to call upon us to confess that their church must be the true church, because constituted of none but true believers; it might sound strangely, but we should not hesitate to reply, that what they rested on as a proof was evidence against and not for their position; and that in freeing themselves, as they thought from all mixture, they had but destroyed the characteristic which the true visible church must present to the end of this dispensation. Yes, we are in no way shaken, but rather confirmed, in our belief of the apostolic character of the church, by finding it so constituted that it gathers of all kinds alike; for however it may be made a reproach against a church that it thus invests with the Christian name those who seem not possessed of the Christian character; and, however it may be argued that the privilege of belonging to the household of God should not even in appearance be bestowed upon any who have not given evidence of genuine conversion, we are persuaded that it is actually the will of the Great Head of the church, that bad as well as good should be members of the visible body, for otherwise the kingdom of heaven could not have been likened to a net, which thrown into the sea must gather indiscriminately of all kinds of fish; and such a representation, elsewhere explicitly given, is involved in our Lord's summons to Peter and Andrew: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

But, now there is an interesting question forced on us by such a conclusion as this, and which may justly engage some moments of our time. It appears from what is involved in preachers being "fishers of men," that it is through the distinct appointment of God that there exists a great mixture in the visible church; and you will naturally inquire what ends can be answered by such an appointment? Would it not, you may say, have been for the honour and spread of Christianity that admission into the visible church should have been confined to such as were members of the invisible; so that there might not have been upon the earth the unseemly spectacle of professed disciples of Christ, whose lives are at variance with the known doctrines of his gospel? No doubt God, though none but God, could have secured the church against the intrusion of all worthless professors. Though "fishers of men," in using the net, can exercise no judgment as to what it shall enclose, God might prevent its being cast where the draught should be of aught else but the good; but who that thinks seriously could desire such an arrangement as this? Who does not feel it a matter for thanksgiving to God, that he has not thus made the visible church the same with the invisible? Not indeed that we are blind to some advantages which would result from the supposed alteration. We know what scandal is brought upon Christianity by the unchristian lives of thousands of the baptized; and we can readily believe that were there a broad line of separation, so that the disciples of Christ stood prominently out from the great mass of the people, the effect would be to recommend Christianity and exhibit it as a religion of which the origin was undoubtedly Divine. We might close our eyes to the fact, that it is the very circumstance of there being a great mixture in the visible church, which, more perhaps than aught besides, impedes the progress of Christianity; and so long as the heathen can point to numbers who bear the Christian name and yet differ not from themselves in the viciousness of life, they will have a very powerful argument with which to meet the remonstrances of the missionary. But whatever the advantages which might follow from the visible church being composed of none but members of the invisible, we are sure that they would be vastly exceeded by the disadvantages. Indeed we hardly know how such an arrangement as we now suppose could subsist with a state of probation. If none were admitted into the church but those on whom God had set his seal, more visibly marking them as his own; a nation would be at once divided into the few that were sure of salvation, and the many, of whom, as yet, there was no ground for hope. Thus the decisions of the judgment-day would be in a great degree anticipated; all who died members of the church would be known to be saved, and all who died without having been admitted would be known to be lost. Who could wish such a state of things as this? It would leave the righteous little or no call for faith, humility, and patience, whilst the unrighteous would plead their exclusion from the privileges of the gospel as a justification of inertness, or a reason for despair. The one would have little or no hope to diligence because admitted into the church, and the other would have none because shut out from that church; and who can doubt that the most violent passions would be fostered, and the most painful feelings excited? If there were this visible separation between the righteous and the unrighteous, it could scarcely be that the righteous would not presume on their superiority, or that the unrighteous would not be irritated by their being left in heathenism; the peace and concord of families would be broken, because one had been taken visibly, and another visibly left, and a household had no longer a community of interest, or hope. And when death entered and took away a member who had never been received into the church, what agony of spirit would seize the survivors, and with how much reason they might refuse to be comforted! It is a singularly blessed and merciful thing that under the present dispensation, we are not furnished with material for passing judgment on the dead. The parent is not shut out from all hope, in regard even of a profligate child whom he has followed in anguish to the grave; he has not the certainty, the actual, the insupportable certainty forced upon him, that his child has been lost for ever. That child was a member of the visible church, entitled through baptism to the ample blessings which Christ purchased by his death, and therefore he is never compelled to feel sure that his son is lost. He knows not what strivings there may have been of the Spirit of God in the very moment of dissolution, nor how much of secret and saving agency may have been successfully applied, when outwardly there were no tokens that such agency was at work. But the child was at least enclosed within the net, and there is nothing to prove it impossible that he may have been drawn up from perdition. The parent may have but the slightest ground of hope, but give hope only a hair breadth, on which to stand, and it will rear a glorious fabric. Whereas, if the child had remained excluded from the church, because destitute of fixed proofs of acceptance with God, hope would not have even the hair-breadth for a footing; the parent must shut himself up to the terrible and desolating certainty that the son over whom he had wept, for whom he had prayed, was everlastingly consigned to the worm that dieth not, and the fire which is not quenched. These and similar consequences which must occur to every man's mind of a Divine appointment, preventing all mixture in the visible church, go clearly to the proving that the existence of such mixture is advantageous, yea, necessary in our present condition, I do not rejoice that every nominal Christian is not also a real Christian. Would that he were! But I do rejoice that the visible church does not shut out the nominal. It might be a blessed thing to live in days when merely nominal Christianity was wholly unknown, and every member of the church was a true servant of Christ; but if our lot is to be cast in times when Christianity has not attained universal dominion, and when its free proffers are rejected by numbers, then it is cause for rejoicing and thankfulness that the visible church is not limited to members of the invisible. Yes; when we think how difficult it would be for the righteous to cultivate Christian graces if they were openly set apart for salvation; and how the unrighteous would be goaded into fierceness or crushed into despair, by having upon them, as it were, the mark of retribution; and when we remember how it would almost incapacitate for discharging the duties of encountering the trials of life, if the future were so laid open that we might follow the dead into the unseen world, and ascertain their final portion, why entertain a feeling of surprise because God has ordained that good and bad shall be promiscuously mingled in his church? We can only reckon it a great instance of the adaptation of the Divine dealings to our circumstances, and therefore a great reason why we should admire and praise the Most High, that there should be such resemblance between the kingdom of heaven and a net gathering every kind of fish, as explained in the largest sense in the words used by our Lord in calling his apostles, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

But whilst, on the authority of such representations as that under review, we speak of the present mixture in the visible church as necessary, we must not forget that a time will come when this mixture shall be corrected. Christianity is designed for universal dominion, and however such design may seem frustrated, so long as its net encloses of all kinds alike, we know that God will yet interfere, and, separating the wicked, and consigning them to destruction, will erect a visible church all whose members shall be holy. At a time, designated in Scripture as the end of the world, the net is to be full; then shall it be drawn to the shore, and the good fish be severed from the bad. But what time are we to understand by "the end of the world?" Not certainly that termination of human affairs which is to take place at the last judgment, but rather the close of the present dispensation; for what we translate "the end of the world" is literally the close of the period of ages. If we receive the predictions of the Bible, and accept this fulfilment, we know assuredly that the time has yet to come when Christianity shall be set up in every household, and enshrined in every heart. The visible church is not to continue to the very end of time an imperfect and mixed community: imperfect, because embracing only certain nations of the earth; and mixed, because including bad as well as good. If the prophets of old "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," there has yet to come a season in which the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and when all shall know Him from the least to the greatest; and if the visible church is thus at length to be purged from all admixture, to enclose all men, and yet enclose none but the good, it is quite clear that the time at which the change and separation take place cannot be at the time of the general judgment. If the bad remain mingled with the good till the time of the general judgment, it is evident that there can be no period at all during which the visible church upon earth will include none but the good. But we have the sure word of prophecy declaring that such a period there certainly shall be. What choice, then, have we but to believe, that if there is to be a separation between the bad and the good, it must be effected before the general judgment, and that consequently, if said to be effected at the end of the world, by the end of the world we must understand the close of the existing dispensation. We believe, then, that the existing dispensation—a dispensation throughout which the "fishers of men" are to gather into their net all kinds of fish—will be brought to a close by the sublime and awful interference which is described in Scripture as the second coming of Christ. Call it, if you will, a personal coming—suppose it, if you will, to be only a spiritual coming, it is a coming to judgment with mystic clouds and a long retinue of vengeance. We are not to glide gradually, by a gentle process of moral improvement and the workings of existing means, into that glorious condition when the globe in its circumference shall form but one temple of the Lord God Almighty. If Scripture be true, we have to pass through the fires, be shaken by the earthquake, confounded by the falling of the stars; the sign of the Son of Man is to be seen in the heavens, and one arrayed as a warrior has to come up from Edom having his garments red with the blood of his enemies. The last days of the dispensation, those which shall immediately precede the visible erection of the Redeemer's sovereignty, are everywhere depicted as days of unequal trouble and conflict—days in which infidelity shall assume portentous strength, and in which Satan, knowing that the time of his being bound is at hand, will gather all his forces for a last mighty struggle, and when, on all human calculation, the remnant of the faithful must be speedily overborne, so that Christ will cease to have a church upon earth: then is it that the Redeemer is suddenly to appear to consume every enemy by the brightness of his coming, and to renovate the globe that it may be a fitting habitation for the righteous and rejoicing community. We affirm confidently that such is the tenor of scriptural representations, and that however men may differ as to the nature of the second coming of Christ, or the probable nearness of the event, they ought, with the Bible for their guide, to be agreed on the fact that the existing dispensation will be closed by a signal interference of God. Can they tell me that the net will not be drawn to shore till the end of time when the white throne shall be set, and the whole human race throng to God's bar? Then I tell them, if this be true, the visible church is never to enjoy those thousand years of purity during which, in the language of Zechariah, "there shall be no war with the Canaanite in the house of the Lord." The bad fish are not to be gradually and silently removed from the net till none but the good remain. They are to be removed, as we learn from the parable, by a process of judgment, the angels coming forth to separate and destroy. And if this process of judgment be what is emphatically called the last judgment, then it is most clear that there can be no millennium at all, no period during which the visible church is to include no wicked, and yet to include all men. It is therefore, with all that is most brilliant, all that is most majestic, all that is most inspiriting in prophecy, that we resist the opinion that the second advent of Christ is not to occur till the general judgment. This advent is to introduce a new dispensation, and not to close God's dealings with man upon earth. For this advent even apostles looked and longed; their writings flash with expectations of the return of their Lord. And why so? Did these men of God desire the immediate judgment of the quick and the dead? Were they ardent with the hope that before Christianity had overcome heathenism, whilst it was yet but an infant religion, received by an inconsiderable section of mankind, the day of grace would be closed and the sentence of eternity passed upon all? Rather, was it not that they associated with the coming of Christ the extermination of wickedness and the establishment of piety, and knew that the glorious days of which prophets had spoken, and of which themselves had caught the dawning when wrapt into futurity, would not break on this creation till the hosts of heaven had been darkened before the Son of Man as he came down in the clouds. For this advent, moreover, has the Christian church in all ages been bidden to look, her motto being watchfulness, because the hour is unknown at which her Lord will re-appear. It must then be an advent which is to introduce, and not to close the millennium. How could the church be in momentary expectation of anything, which was sure not to happen for at least a thousand years? Yes, a day approaches, we know not how distant, but we seem not without its harbingers, when the fishers shall have finished their work, when the net shall be full, when the visible church shall have gathered into its community all whom God has purposed to call under the present dispensation; a command shall be issued for drawing the net to land; the head of the church shall himself descend and take all those who are professedly his members; with an unerring discrimination shall the good be separated from the bad, the appearance shall not pass for the reality, neither shall the reality be overlooked because wanting the appearance; this separation will be effected by a distinct act of judgment, Christ assuming and exercising that authority which he obtained by virtue of his passion. Then shall all those who bear, but disgrace, the Christian name be swept from the earth, while such as love the Lord Jesus in sincerity shall be acknowledged by him as his own, and formed into a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; and thus will a new dispensation be introduced, the dispensation of a triumphant in place of a struggling Christianity—a period during which the Redeemer is to reign with his saints, and whatsoever liveth upon the earth is to rejoice beneath his sceptre. We do not mean to question or deny that the net will in a certain sense be drawn to land when any one of you shall die. There is an unerring discrimination at every man's death; he is taken out of the net—if he be found good he passeth into happiness, if bad, he is thrown to destruction. But this is not the drawing of the whole net to land, though it is such a separation as should set us all on examining whether or not we are in the faith. The drawing of the whole net to land is associated with the second advent of Christ, because that advent is to introduce a season, when there shall be no such thing as mere nominal Christianity, when tares shall be no longer mixed with wheat, and bad fish no longer with the good. With Balaam, we ask, "Who shall live when God doeth this?" Of the times and the seasons we are necessarily ignorant; we assume not to conjecture, much less to decide, whether many or few years have to pass ere the fishers work being done, the net shall be full and drawn to the shore. But of this we are quite sure, that no proof can be given that it may not be whilst we are yet upon the earth, that Christ shall re-appear and commission his angels to the stern work of judgment. The coming is to be altogether unexpected; it is to take all nature by surprise, "for as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until all the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." It is not, then, because all things are proceeding in their accustomed order, and men are not startled by signs of approaching interference, that we may justly conclude Christ's coming to be distant. As surely the day of the Lord will come, and just as assuredly when it cometh it will come as "a thief in the night." It may then come in our own lifetime; even now may the cords of the net be in the hands of the angels, and they may but wait the Divine mandate to draw to the land. We give it to you as a fresh incentive to diligence and vigilance in your spiritual calling, that the Lord may come whilst you are yet numbered with the living. It is not much to tell you that you cannot reckon on to-morrow, that you are bound to be earnest in working out salvation, inasmuch as you know not that a single day is left you in which to secure immortality. But, practically there is but little force in what ought to be so startling. Sudden death is comparatively very rare, and so long as men do not feel that sickness is at work upon their frames, they can hardly persuade themselves of the possibility that death may be at hand. But we now tell you, that whilst the pulse is beating strongly, and the eye is not dim, and the spirit not broken, there may be heard the cry, "Behold the Judge standeth at the door." We tell you that sickness may be far off, that death may be far off, and yet nevertheless you are not sure of another day of probation. Whilst not near the grave, you may be within a hair-breadth of judgment. So that the doctrine of Christ's advent doubles, as it were, the likelihood of sudden death; and we send you to your homes to muse on the two probabilities; the first, that you have but a short time to live; the second, that a little while and Christ may come to judgment. The "fishers of men" have been busy with all of us; all of us are inclosed within the net; the meshes are around us; so that we must be judged as Christians and not as heathens. Oh! will it be found at last, that we are only bound the tighter for the burning? or will it not rather be found—God grant it may—that God has verified in our experience his gracious words to the Jews: "I drew them with the cords of a man, with the bands of love.?"

THE LOVE OF GOD ENLARGING THE HEART.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 18, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."—Psalm cxix. 32.

THERE has not passed on a man any renewing change, unless his affections have been pressed into the service of God. No doubt the understanding has a large office to perform in the things of religion, theology, as much as any natural science, demanding the exercise of all those reasoning powers which belong to our nature. We reckon it as the noblest contemplation of man, when we survey him as created, body, soul, and spirit, for the service of his Maker, and we count it at the same time the noblest, as well as the truest contemplation of Christianity, when it is regarded as a system which engages the whole man in his triple constitution, and leaves no faculty which belongs to either of the parts unconcerned in the business of glorifying the Lord. If we think on our first parent as created in uprightness, we must suppose him to have combined, in all the perfection of which they are susceptible, those intellectual powers which are broken and dispersed amongst his descendants. A brilliant imagination, a clear and strong judgment, a vigorous memory, a keen discernment, these without question belonged to Adam in a degree unparalleled amongst ourselves, so that in the first of men burned the fire of genius with a splendour unknown in our present degeneracy. It has been well said, in reference to what we call great and commanding in science, that possibly Athens was but the ruins of Paradise, and an Aristotle only the rubbish of Adam. Mental talent is but a fragment of man's early greatness, a relic of man's early innocence; and when God, moved by his compassions towards the alienated family, arranged a scheme for restoring them to their forfeited position, it was altogether to be looked for, that whilst dealing with man as an immortal creature he would have respect to him also as an intellectual. This expectation, just as it is natural, is wondrously fulfilled by Christianity. Where is the science which, in the march of its discoveries, has not greatly contributed to the evidence and illustration of Scripture? Where is the individual who, having brought industry and intelligence to the study of nature, has not been, though perhaps unconsciously, and perhaps even unwillingly, an auxiliary to those who have laboured in the defence of the faith? And when has religion a nobler triumph, than when, gaining to her side a man gifted above his fellows in mental endowment, she has taught him the high employ of glorifying God with the majesty of talent, as well as the fervour of affection?

We make these remarks, because we wish you thoroughly to understand, that every power which comes from God by donation may go back to God in dedication. We wish you to be possessed of the important fact, that religion deals with the whole man, and not with a fraction of the man. It does not so consult the heart as to pass over the head; it rather comes with an improving and elevating power into every organ of the creature, and whilst it impregnates the soul with the hopes of immortality, it ennobles the intellect by directing it to the loftiest of truths, and genius by pluming its wing for a higher than mortal flight.

The occupation of the heart, then, is the great thing in religion: not because, the heart being mastered, other parts may be overlooked, for religion, as we have just said, is the nourisher and not the despiser of intellect, but simply because, in the first place, until the heart is carried there can be no real conversion, for the converted man loves God, and love is from the heart, and because,in the second place, the conquest of the heart involves as a natural and necessary consequence the conquest of the remainder of the man. We reckon it of first rate importance, that religion should thus be viewed as setting up in the heart the centre of its empire, but at the same time as sending out thence an energising influence which leaves unaffected no part of its subject. There is no real empire established unless the heart have been gained; but let the heart have been gained, and there will be no contempt for and no overlooking of reason and intellect, and all the rich furniture of mental endowment, as either unworthy or unsuited to be used in the service of God. On the contrary, there will be presented the picture of every faculty employed, and at the same time ennobled by the employment; and the lesson shall be practically taught, that the Almighty equips man with no capacity and bestows on him no talent, and distinguishes him by no property, which, being devoted to the offices of religion, will yield no revenue of honour to himself.

Now, there is mention made of the heart in our text; but it is that kind of mention which bears out, we think, our foregoing remarks. You must remember that the speaker, the Psalmist, is not an unconverted man, but one who had long before been brought under the dominion of religion. He is not, therefore, soliciting the first entrance, but the after and multiplied workings of a principle of grace; and he states his desire in an expression which is singularly descriptive of that outgoing of an influence from the heart over the rest of the man, upon which your attention has been turned. His wish is that his heart might be enlarged; and we consider this wish as amounting to a longing that the whole of himself might act in unison with the heart, so that he might become, as it were, all heart, and thus the heart in the strictest sense be enlarged, through the spreading of itself over body and soul, expanding itself till it embraced all the powers of both. If there be the love of God in the heart, then gradually the heart, possessed and actuated by so noble and stirring a principle, will bring over to a lofty consecration all the energies, whether mental or corporeal, and thus the result shall be practically the same as though the other departments of man were turned into heart, and he became, according to the phrase which we have just before used, and which we are accustomed to employ when describing a character of unwonted generosity and warmth, "all heart." So that the desire after an enlarged heart you may fairly consider tantamount to a desire that every faculty might be brought into thorough subjection to God, and that just as God himself is love—love being rather the Divine essence than a Divine attribute, and therefore love mingling itself with all the properties of Godhead, so the man having love in the heart might become all heart, the heart throwing itself into all his capacities, pervading but not obliterating the characteristics of his nature. And exactly in accordance with this view of the enlargement of heart which the Psalmist desired is the practical result which was to follow on its attainment. He was already walking the way of God's commandments, but what he proposed to himself was the running that way. "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." A quickened pace, a more rapid progress, a greater alacrity, a

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firmer constancy, a more resolute and unflinching obedience, these were the results which the Psalmist looked for from enlargement of heart. And truly if all the faculties of mind and body be dedicated to God, with a constant and a vigorous step will man press on in the way that leadeth to heaven. So long as the dedication is at best only partial, the world retaining some fraction of its empire, notwithstanding the setting up of the kingdom of God, there can be nothing but a slow and impeded progress, a walking interrupted by frequent haltings, if not backslidings—by much of loitering, if not of actual retreat; but if the man be all heart, then he will be all life, all warmth, all zeal, all energy, and the consequence on this complete surrender to God will be exactly that which is prophetically announced by Isaiah—"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

You may thus easily trace a connection between our foregoing views of the enlargement of heart which the Psalmist desires, and that running the way of God's commandments which he proposes as the consequence. Suppose, however, we handle the text in a more popular manner. The heart is often taken in Scripture for the whole soul, the understanding and will, in its several affections and emotions. For example, you are told that God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand which is on the seashore. Here certainly the enlarged heart would seem to denote that vast and comprehensive spirit which, like that which we supposed of man's first ancestor, could fathom nature, taken in its greater things and in its lesser. And if you look carefully through the 119th Psalm, you will find that the author dwells with a sort of repetition on the effect of religion upon the intellect and the understanding. Thus he declares—"Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies." Again he says—"Through thy precepts I get understanding." And once more—"I understand more than the ancients." Why? "Because I keep thy precepts." So that it was evidently the uppermost consciousness in the mind of the author of this Psalm, that religion told mightily on all the powers of man—that if the understanding were to be enlightened, the intellect strengthened, and the judgment improved, then the effective engine for bringing round such results was Scriptural truth, handled and applied by the Spirit of God. We may therefore suppose that by an enlarged heart is intended that enlargement of the soul, in its powers as well as in its affections, which is evidently referred to in other parts of the Psalm as resulting from the workings of religion. Admitting this, we invite you to a very interesting inquiry. We will endeavour, in the first place, to show you how God by his grace enlarges the human soul; we will then, in the second place, connect such enlargement with the result alleged in our text, and then show you how truly David associated cause with effect, when he exclaimed—"I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

I. Now, the first question before us is—supposing that by the heart, the whole soul, with all its powers and affections, is intended, how comes it to be true that God by his grace enlarges the soul? We take a man's understanding. We are accustomed to think and to say, that though busying himself with scientific inquiries, through all those processes of discipline which are furnished by the study of abstruse and sublime things, through converse with history, and with the writings of illustrious men, through the exercising itself on those difficult and unsolved problems which are presented by the mysteries of nature and the fortunes of nations, we are accustomed to believe that by these and similar means the human understanding may be made stronger and more comprehensive; and we are far enough from underrating these prescribed modes of enlarging the mind; we are far enough from disputing the possibility of its enlargement through the well-applied efforts of a vigorous education; for in the mind of a peasant whose every moment is bestowed on wringing from the soil a scanty livelihood for himself and his household, there may slumber powers which, had they been evolved by early discipline, would have elevated their possessor into the first rank of philosophers; and many a mechanic who goes patiently the round of unvaried toil is unconsciously the owner of faculties which, nursed and expanded by instruction and exercise, would have enabled him perhaps to electrify senates, and to exercise over his fellows all that commanding influence which is ordinarily conceded to superiority of talent. And therefore we make every admission of the power which resides in cultivation of enlarging and unfolding the human understanding; for we do not at all question that mental capacities are equally distributed amongst the different classes of society, so that if it were not that the adventitious circumstances of birth entailed the advantages of education there would be sent out from the lower grades the same proportion as from the higher of individuals distinguished by all the energies of talent. But, nevertheless, we are clear upon the point, that nothing more enlarges the understanding than the grace which God pours in upon it, when he is engaged in carrying on to perfection the work of sanctification. Of course I never tell you that religion will supply the place of education, or that the imbuing the soul with piety will be practically the same thing as storing the mind with scholarship. We do not, for example, maintain that the peasant who becomes not the philosopher simply because his mental powers have not been disciplined, would leave the plough for the orrery, if his understanding were expanded by religion. Education may give the powers to philosophical men that religion would not; but assuredly there may be enlargement of understanding—ay, vast strengthening and bringing out of capacities, and nevertheless there would be given so different a bias that we shall find a similar result from faculties as unfolded by religion, and those same faculties as unfolded by education. And after laying down these premises, who will deny that on a man's conversion follows a great enlargement of that man's understanding? Is it—can it be a large understanding which is conversant with nothing but the century of a finite existence; or rather, if heretofore the understanding have grasped nothing but the truths of an hour or a league, and these have appeared to have filled it to the full, must there not have taken place a scarcely measurable enlargement, if eternity and infinity are now gathered within its spreadings? And if it be the contemplation of noble and majestic things which causes the understanding to shoot up its stature, and to amplify itself on the right hand and on the left, so that the mind remains dwarfish through not being brought into contact with gigantic truth, where will you find us such a nourisher, such a magnifier of the understanding, as religion, seeing that through the operations of God's grace there is a comparative abandonment of a survey of the created, and a fastening of the gaze on the Creator himself, and the spirit is carried into a region inaccessible to an unconverted man, and is engaged in climbing truths which are never surmounted by the loftiest intelligence, and thus brought precisely into that intercourse with the mighty, and the colossal, which tells most on its powers, quickening them into rapid growth, and bringing to light unsuspected resources? We hold that it must be the true dignity of the soul, and that as long as this is unattained she can be but a prisoner sepulchred in flesh, to have right apprehensions of God—his excellency, his greatness, his goodness, and to discern that, however beautiful and attractive the objects of worldly pursuit, they are unworthy the seekings of one illustrious as herself, the child of immortality; and, therefore, do we further hold, that inasmuch as the operations of grace alone exalt the soul to this her rightful dignity, these operations are to be considered as resulting in the enlargement of the soul, the soul being necessarily contracted whilst kept out of her place in the scale of intellectual being and therefore as necessarily enlarged when allowed to mount up and occupy that place. Therefore it must in the strictest sense be true that religion is effectual to the enlarging of the understanding. We should not even hesitate to say that it invigorates all the powers of the mind. If any study can improve the faculties through being a sublime and difficult study, must not the study of religion? Where is the study so awfully sublime? Where the one so intensely difficult? If it be for the benefit of the mental energies that we come under the tuition of highly gifted men, the mind gathering greatness from collision with greatness, shall it not come to pass, that these energies are mightily strengthened, when the teacher is God himself, the whole process of instruction being carried on by his Spirit? If it be an advantage to our judgment, and if it be essential to our exercising a good and clear discernment, that it should not be warped by passion, that prejudices generated and fostered by self-love should be allowed no voice in the decision, where will you find so free and impartial a tribunal as in the understanding of a man who is the subject of grace, a higher dominion than human being set up over the passions, and a corrective the most effectual applied to the prejudices? So that, whether you view the matter generally, or descend into particulars, we think you must allow that God enlarges the human understanding when he brings a man into acquaintance with himself. God is so magnificent, so wonderful, that it must be an effort to the soul to take in any discoveries which he makes of himself; but the very effort will be an improving and invigorating thing. The soul will grow, through her strivings to embrace the infinite; the understanding will dilate as more and more of Deity presents itself to the grasp; and thus, from the beginning to the end, God is enlarging the heart. He cannot excite to a discovery of himself, and he cannot make a discovery of himself which does not demand an effort of the soul in order to its being received; and the making the effort is the expanding the powers.

II. And if we have succeeded in showing you that the heart is enlarged, so far as the heart is resolvable into the understanding, we may readily go on to prove that the heart is enlarged, if by the heart we intend the will and the affections. It is one great characteristic of a righteous man that he is gradually conforming his own will to the will of his Maker. It would be Christian perfection to have no will but God's will, and though we do not say that this perfection is actually obtained by any of the righteous of the earth, yet there will be a continual advance towards the attainment, so that the identification of wills, if not in every respect complete, will daily become more and more accurate. And a man's will being thus gradually exchanged for God's, there must be going forward an enlargement of the will; for just consider the province of the will. Your understanding may deliver its verdict as to what is best to be done, but your will may altogether set this verdict aside, and determine on adopting a directly opposite course. From this decision of the will there is no appeal whatever. The will sits as the prince and the ruler of our actions, and possesses an unquestioned and properly exercised power of preferring the lesser good to the greater—yea, and even despite all the decisions of the understanding, of choosing the evil and rejecting the good. So that you might enlarge the understanding, and yet through not taking also the will you might bring the world round to a moral revolution. Why, this is a case of almost every day occurrence. The understanding of men is so far enlarged that they perceive certain courses to be sinful and dangerous, but those courses cannot be abandoned, except on the decision of the will; and in nine cases out of ten—nay, in every case where there has been no corresponding enlarging of the will, in place of being abandoned, the course has been pursued, and the exhibited spectacle is the frequent yet melancholy one of a man fighting against his convictions; informed as to the right, and yet choosing the wrong. And therefore we call it an enlargement of the will when the decisions of this faculty go along with the understanding. An enlarged understanding will perceive more and more what is right and what is good, and an enlarged will determines on adopting what is thus approved by the understanding. And it is this contemporaneous enlargement of the understanding and the will which we affirm to take place in every renewed man. The understanding, as we have shown you, is enlarged by the power of the Holy Spirit. But then it is a constant rule in God's spiritual dealings, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." God does not merely cause a man to perceive what is good—which is just the enlarging the understanding; he causes him also to prefer what is good, and this is just the enlarging of his will. In everything he conforms the man's will to his own, and we suppose that if it be fair to call that a contracted will which decides for a moment against an eternity, which chooses the trifling good, because present, rather than the unmeasured, because future; and that if, on the other hand, it be right to call that an enlarged will which postpones the temporary to the never-ending—which overlooks the transient, though visible, when brought into competition with the abiding, though invisible—then, inasmuch as we have here precisely the difference between the will of a man who is the subject of grace, and the will of another man who is not the subject of grace, we must be borne out in saying that an enlargement of the will, just as well as an enlargement of the understanding, is a consequence of a work of religion, and that in and through spiritual dealings God enlarges the heart, whether the heart be resolved into the understanding, or into the will. Yea, and this result is greatly brought round through the instrumentality of the affections. The grand principle implanted in man by grace, and wanting in man by nature, is the love of God. Where there is the love of God, there will be the striving, in the first place, to know more and more of God, and hence comes enlargement of understanding; and in the second place, to obey God better and better, and hence comes the enlargement of the will. It is a thing well worth your remark, and so obvious as hardly to be overlooked, that all love, except the love of God, reduces and contracts the soul. If a man be covetous, so that he fastens his affections upon money, you will ordinarily find him narrow-minded; his intellect, whatever its natural capacities will embrace little or nothing beyond modes of accumulation, and grow practically unable to overstretch the circles of profit and loss. It is just the same if a man's love be fixed on reputation; it is impossible that there should be enlarged views, when those views centre on one's self. There may be lofty and far-spreading schemes—for ambition can look upon a world and think it too narrow for its march. But so long as these schemes are schemes for the aggrandisement of self, they may take a creation for their sphere, and yet be required to be described as pitiful and niggardly. It is no mark of an expansive mind that it can be filled with a unit, and many a philanthropist, labouring quietly and unobtrusively for the well-being of a solitary parish, or neighbourhood, has thereby proved himself a larger hearted, a larger souled creature than an Alexander, boundless in his graspings, and that too on the clear and straightforward principle that a heart which holds only one's self is a narrower and a more circumscribed thing than another which contains a multitude of our fellow men. The truth is, that all objects of love, except God, are smaller than the heart. They can only fill the heart through the heart being contracted and narrow. The human will was framed, on its first creation, to such wideness as to be capable of enjoying God, though not of fully comprehending him; and it still retains so much of its glorious original, that all other things gather it in and straiten it from its natural size, whilst the love of God not only occupies it to the full, but, inasmuch as in its broadest enlargement it is still infinitely too narrow for God, this love doth, as it were, stretch it and dilate it, enabling it to hold more, and giving it at the same time more to hold. So that were we to derive the truth that God enlarges the heart of his people from the fact that God endows their hearts with love to himself, there would be nothing wanting to the completeness of the proof; for the love of God is that ethereal and glowing principle which, continually expanding, causes its receptacle, which has heretofore been shrunk up and collapsed, to spread out in its own dimension, and thus to attain unto something of that size which must have belonged to it whilst man was yet in his innocence. Understanding, then, and will, and affections, O Lord God, it is thy grace which does enlarge them all! Beneath the presence of thy Spirit it is that the human mind grows great. Give me, when I seek for large and unprejudiced views, for clearness and strength of mental vision, give me the peasant on whom Divine grace has wrought, rather than the philosopher who is an utter stranger to vital religion. And now, having shown what an expanding effect there is in the possession of godliness, are you not prepared for the inference which the Psalmist draws from the words of the text: "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart?"

You will not require much proof that the running the way of God's commandments follows the enlargement of the heart. We have observed already that the Psalmist was walking the way of God's commandments, and the object of his desires was a greater quickness or alacrity, so that his pace might be that of a runner rather than that of a walker. It must have appeared from the whole tenor of our remarks, that an increased rapidity of advance is intended by the "running" of our text, the progress becoming swifter and swifter in proportion as the heart is enlarged. So that the running is supposed dependent on the enlargement. I do not imagine that the enlargement is one definite act, and the running one definite pace. It is clear, on the contrary, that the enlargement will be progressive, the heart continually expanding, and that at the same time the running will be accelerated, the velocity continually increasing. So that our only business is to prove to you that an enlarged heart will produce a readier and a more constant obedience. But the least reference to what I have already established will furnish evidence enough. The enlarged heart includes, as we have shown you, an enlarged understanding and an enlarged will. The enlargement of the understanding supposes you more disposed to follow only what is good. The former, therefore, is the same thing as our discerning more and more of the demands of God's law; the latter is the same thing as our determining to act on the discernment. But what is this, save in so many words an enlarged heart producing an ampler obedience? The understanding is enlarged, so that we see more of what is demanded; the will is enlarged, so that we resolve on conforming ourselves to those discoveries of the understanding. And if we both find out more and more of what is to be done, and more of the course which we ascertain to be right, then we are clearly advancing in the work of obedience. And if, yet further, both these results are to be traced to the heart's enlargement as a cause, who can avoid discovering the force of the connection—"I will run the way of thy commandments, *when* thou shalt enlarge my heart?" We will just add, that love, which we showed to be mainly productive of the enlargement, is in all cases the great spring of obedience. Let a man love God, and he will strive to obey God, not more from a principle of duty than from a feeling of delight. Oh! we do a vast wrong to religion when we represent it as a system which requires of a man that he should be perpetually and unflinchingly thwarting his desires. The desires, indeed, of the flesh; the desires which emanate from those remainders of corruption which weary and oppress the most righteous; to grow remiss in the thwarting all these, were to prove him a backslider; to grant them indulgence were to cast away allegiance. But are there no other desires which throb and glow in the breasts of the godly? Born again of an incorruptible seed, impregnated with celestial principles, equipped and freighted for immortality, have they no longings but these, which they are bound to repress; no burning and beating wish against which they are not bound to a war of extermination? But we will not give harbourage to the thought that he who serves God can serve him only by mortification; we will not have piety thus invested with nothing but the sack-cloth; we put from us those representations of religion which exhibit its subject as always under constraint—as godly by force, and not by inclination. "Thy people shall be willing," was the prophetic pledge to the Messiah; and let the love of God be actually the ruling principle in the soul, and shall there not arise a willingness distinctly opposed to that doing of violence into which some would resolve the whole of religion? I must do violence to the love of the world; I must do violence to the love of the objects of sense; I must do violence to the love of ease, to the love of reputation, to the love, in general, of created good; but the trying thing, the desperate thing, is to do violence to the master principle; and the master principle in every renewed man's spirit is, or ought to be, the love of God. It is not the love of the world, otherwise he can never yet have separated himself from the world; it is not the love of things of sense, otherwise he is yet carnal, and the great change of conversion has still to be wrought. I do not indeed say that these principles will be altogether annihilated in the converted and righteous individual. They will retain their existence, and often struggle, and that too very vehemently for the mastery. But neither of them can be the master principle, for conversion is the introduction of a new master principle into the soul—that new master principle is the love of God, and if the love of God be the master principle in a believer, then to obey God is to thwart the inferior principle and to gratify the superior. Therefore the pleasure must more than counterbalance the pain. We are safe in affirming—ay, and we hope there are many amongst you, whose experience can bear out the accuracy of the statement—we are safe in affirming, that he who glows with the love of God as his Creator and Redeemer, will be carried on by natural and delighted impulse, to the doing God's will, and that not as a servant dreading the lash of the task-master, but as a son rejoicing in the smile of a father. He will give himself to all the labours of a high-wrought obedience, and not as one driven, but only as one invigorated. He will run the way of God's commandments when God enlarges his heart. "Indeed," says an old divine, "the soul when enlarged by Divine love, runs in the ways of God as the sun in his course which finds no difficulty, but being naturally fitted and carried to that motion, he goes forth as a bridegroom, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race."

Such is the connection we propose to trace between the enlargement of the heart and the running the way of God's commandments. It is a connection which you can hardly fail to observe for yourselves. If you do not enter so fully into more philosophical descriptions of an enlarged heart, an enlarged understanding, and an enlarged will, at least you must all perceive how the affections, when once abstracted from earthly things and fixed on God, will prompt you to a more earnest obedience; and how, therefore, the heart, if expanding to embrace the Creator, in place of contracting itself so as to hold only the creature, will cause the Christian to feel it his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father, and make him run with an ever increasing speed the race set before him by the gospel of Christ. We have nothing to add but the simple and earnest exhortation that you all aim at higher and higher degrees of obedience, and seek from God, who alone can confer it, that expansion of soul, which produces alacrity and constancy in duty. Be watchful, we beseech of you, that ye narrow not the heart by pouring into it the finite and the perishable. The heart, as we have shown you, has this mysterious property, that if occupied by the creature it will shrink and shrivel up till no bigger than its tenant—occupied by the Creator it will stretch, and delight, and dilate, till there are no bounds to its enlargement, since none to its occupant. We would therefore have you on your guard, ye who are professors of godliness, that ye do not contract the heart by centreing the faculties on things and beings of this earth; give those affections to God, and the heart is a globe, filled and expanded so that it mounts to the heavens; give them to the world and the globe lies shrunk and shrivelled on the ground, a sand-grain weight enough to keep it fast to the earth. And whenever ye find that your pace in obedience seems slackening, that ye walk less steadily and less uprightly than in by-gone days, that ye have reason to address to yourselves, with no small measure of anxiety and misgiving, the words of St. Paul to the Galatians—"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"—then look, we beseech you, praying earnestly at the same time, that God will aid you in the search, "Search me, O God, and try my heart"—then look, we beseech you well to the heart: see whether it hath not been narrowed by the prostitution of its affections; for if the heart must be enlarged, if we run, must it not have been contracted, when we walked? "Keep," therefore, "the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

THE ORIGIN OF SPEECH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 25, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?"—Exodus iv. 11.

THESE words were addressed to Moses, when the Lord appeared to him in Horeb, and commanded him to take a message to Pharaoh. An exile from Egypt, the future lawgiver feared to place himself in the power of his enemies, and was reluctant to undertake the commission. He knew, moreover, that the Israelites were degraded by slavery, and he thought that announcements in the name of the God of their fathers would be received either with the indifference of ignorance or with the opposition of idolatry, and supposing on every account that he should have no success in his endeavours to emancipate the oppressed, he strove by various reasons to excuse himself from the proposed undertaking. God wrought miracles in order to assure him; his rod became a serpent, and his hand, when thrust into his bosom, was leprous as snow. He was told that these miracles should be repeated, as signs to convince the Israelites of his commission, and that if they yet remained incredulous, he should take of the waters of the river, and pour them on the dry land, and the waters should be turned into blood. We might have thought that, furnished with such overpowering credentials, Moses would no longer have hesitated, but have gone boldly on to the execution of his task. Equipped with the power of working miracles, why should he fear to face either an insolent monarch or an ignorant people? Yet the possession of supernatural might did not satisfy Moses. There was one gift in which he felt himself deficient, and he did not think that other and rarer gifts made up the deficiency. So soon as God had assured him that he should authenticate his mission by miracles, Moses said unto the Lord, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." Moses felt that in standing before Pharaoh; way might be made in bending the haughty king as much by the strength of language as by the power of miracles; he knew also that in stirring the energies of a long-enslaved people he would require a voice as well as an arm clothed with the thunder; and he felt that a multitude who might look with nothing but a stupid amazement on the exhibition of a prodigy, would start into action at the trumpet call of an indignant eloquence. Moses, then, did not desire what was unimportant or superfluous; his fault lay in not believing that God would take care to supply the deficiency. He did not sufficiently recognize or remember, that the power of speech is from the Lord, and that it is God alone who gives the eloquent tongue, as well as any other endowment, whether bodily or mental; and therefore God does not rebuke him by telling him that oratory was not necessary to the execution of his task; he simply refers him to the origin of speech, and thus, reminding him that he who summoned him to his work had words as well as miracles at his disposal, chides his faithlessness, and instantly removes his objection. "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?"

Now, you will observe, that there are two great truths asserted in these words; the first the truth, that language is of Divine original; the second, that every case of inability to speak is of Divine appointment. We will take these truths in succession. If you were to set aside the information of the Bible, and then espouse some infidel theory on the origin of man, there is nothing which would so perplex you to account for as language. It is easy enough to understand how language is propagated; the child catches it gradually from the parents, and by an imperceptible, though most wonderful process, acquires the faculty of embodying its ideas in words. And as you go back, from generation to generation, you have no difficulty in conceiving the continued transmission; you suppose language travelling down to us, like the earth on which we dwell, a kind of heir-loom in the family of man. But if you ascend so far in your research, as to reach the commencement of the human race, what account do you have then to give of language? You may have been accustomed to consider it just as natural to man to speak as to walk; but this is a mistake. A child left to itself may learn to walk, but a child left to itself would never learn to speak; it would utter sounds, but it would never connect sounds with thoughts—it would never, that is, learn to express certain thoughts by certain sounds. It might invent some jargon of its own, but as to anything which should at all resemble even the elements of a language, and a system of sounds by which everything around us should be classified and defined, you will never think that this could be found in the accidental babblings of infancy; and however you may seek to account upon natural principles for the origin of language, we still venture to say, that unless you receive the Mosaic account of the creation, there is no phenomenon so hopelessly inexplicable as language. We are sure, that if you will only ponder the phenomenon of language and the mystery of speech, you will find yourself driven from science to Scripture for anything that approaches a satisfactory explanation. It is, as we have already said, so much a matter of course that men should speak, that we treat it as no more surprising a fact than that they should see or hear. But it must be utter carelessness and want of observation, which can make us pronounce language innate. The question of the origin of language may never occur to you, but when once proposed, the more you examine it, independently of the Bible, the more will you be perplexed, and the more will you be confounded. We would not wish a better argument with which to press the infidel, who would bring into doubt the Mosaic account of the creation, than that which we thus fetch from the invention of speech. Unless it be supposed that God formed man at first, and gave him the organs of speech, ay, and then taught him their use, and furnished him with words by which ideas should be expressed, language is the most unintelligible of prodigies; and you may search the universe and find nothing which you may not account for without God, if you can shut out his agency from the introduction of speech; and it were a fine attack on the boldness of Atheism, if in the midst of an unbeliever's declamation, when he is advocating a wretched system of materialism, and striving to set off by the tinsel of a false rhetoric the nothingness and absurdity of his theories of chance, we should bear down upon him with the question of the text: "Who hath made man's mouth?" We should like, when with a prostituted reason and a perverted genius some disciple of scepticism is labouring to undermine the pretensions of Scripture, and affording what he calls philosophical explanations of the origin of all things—we should like to fasten him down to an inquiry into the origin of that very power through which he is making an impression on his audience; and if he will tell us how it came to pass that he is able to speak, and if he will show us that the mightiest of our ancestry could have invented and handed down that faculty which in all its prowess he wields against his Maker, we will take him as our guide to elaborate the wonders, and follow him cheerfully across the waste of his speculations.

And there is Scriptural evidence of the fact, that God taught man language, or that the language first spoken was Divine in its origin. You will observe that so soon as man was created God spake unto him; and thus the first use of words was to communicate the thoughts of God. But the thoughts of God must have been communicated in the words of God, and man could not have understood God's words, unless he had been first taught them of God; so that when on the very outset of human existence you find conversation held between man and his Maker, you are forced to conclude, that since on no supposition could man in such a brief space have invented a language, the employed language must have been Divine, and Adam must have received from God the earliest intimations of speech. If we even allow what we contend to have been incredible, that in process of time Adam would have made a language for himself, it is still evident that he required and that he used language long before he could have invented it. You are told that "when the Lord God had formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, he brought them unto Adam, to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called any living creature, that was the name thereof." In what manner can you understand this statement? To suppose that Adam gave names at random, employing words without reference to ideas, is clearly unwarrantable, for we should thus have, as we before said, not language, but jargon. To suppose, again, that he was acquainted with all the properties of the animals, and gave a name expressive of the idea, is as untenable a supposition as the former, unless you add the supposition of a Divine influence on his mind. The animals were only just created, and since he could not know their characteristics by experience, how otherwise could he know them than by revelation? It seems, then, fair to conclude, that God instructed Adam as to the names which living creatures were to bear; so that the bringing to the first of our race the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air may have been giving him a lesson in language. Besides, if man had taught himself language, he must have had associates with whom to communicate. It is incredible, under any point of view, that he could have devised a medium of communication, when there existed no being with whom he could communicate; and yet Adam must have learned language before he had a help-meet. So soon as Eve was formed Adam said, "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." So that it was not from the association of man and woman that language arose; language preceded that association; and since man could speak language alone, we conclude that he must have been taught to speak directly of God.

And moreover, cannot we certainly gather from Scripture that God instructed the first man in religion? He placed him in a garden, which was nothing less than a glorious and beautiful temple, whose trees were sacramental and whose fruits were mysteries; and having formed Adam in his own image, he constituted him, as it were, high priest of the magnificent sanctuary, and appointed him as lord over the creation, to present his homage and to burn the incense of his loyalty. But if God instructed man in religion—and who will believe that man was thrown forth as an outcast, and left to grope painfully his way to acquaintance with his Maker?—if God instructed man in religion, must he not also have instructed him in language, so necessary to support intercourse between the Creator and the creature? Can we think that man was left to attain, by a tedious and difficult process, the power of expressing his feelings, ere the recesses of Paradise echoed with prayer, and the anthem of praise was heard from its bowers? Shall we not rather think, that so soon as man walked forth upon creation, and gazed on the loveliness of the sparkling earth, and beheld the canopy with which his dwelling place was arched, and marked on every side those impressions of power and goodness which must have commended themselves to his unbiassed mind with the resistlessness unknown to the alienated and depraved—shall we not think, that in this the first hour of his being he felt within himself the burnings of love and the prostration of reverence—that he was conscious of mighty emotions excited by the breathing beauty, the grandeur and the gladness of the vast panorama—emotions which were too big for the heart, and demanded a vent? And can we doubt that God, who had thus crowded the soul with sublime and enraptured ideas, taught at the same time the tongue its office, and clothed it with speech, so that, as he stood in the midst of the architecture of God, greatness and goodness encompassing him in a thousand manifestations, there must have passed from Adam the rich words of thankfulness, and creation thrilled at the rich melody of language? Oh! we could not believe that for a long while there was silence upon earth, and that until man was forced by his necessities to the exercise of speech he was incapacitated from offering the tribute of praise; we cannot believe that in the days of his innocence, when he must have loved and delighted in God with a devotion and joyousness unfelt since the entrance of evil, and when there ascended a universal anthem from the lowing herds, and the waving forests, and the rushing waters, and the warbling birds, man was disqualified for magnifying his Maker, so that when his heart beat highest, and there was most of religion in his soul, he could not employ the best member which he had in the service and to the glory of the Great Author of his being. We could not believe this; and yet this we must believe, if we question the fact that God taught man language. If God did not make man's mouth, if the earliest intimations of language were not matters of revelation, then it seems thoroughly demonstrable that God must have left man without instruction in religion. We may apply to the earliest as well as to the latest times the rule of Scripture—"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;" and if it be clear from such a rule, that all knowledge of heavenly things must have had its origin in revelation, it is equally clear that the communication of knowledge must have included the communication of language. So that you have no alternative between denying that God instructed man in religion, and allowing that God instructed him in language; and thus we consider the Scriptural evidence decisive on the fact, that language was most strictly of Divine origin, and not of human invention, and that the only satisfactory answer to the question, "Who hath made man's mouth?" is that which is contained in the concluding question of our text, "Have not I the Lord?"

Now, the power of speech it is which pre-eminently distinguishes man from other inhabitants of the earth. You often indeed say that reason is the splendid and noble characteristic which marks off man from every other animal; yet it might readily be shown, that without language there could be but little use of reason. It may only be because God has given speech to man, and withheld it from the brute, that the instinct, which often surprises us by its power, remains so far below reason. When asked, therefore, for the distinguishing characteristic of man, we are inclined to give speech. God took man as his pupil, and instructing him to speak, and equipping him with words as the representatives of ideas, exalted him to an unmeasured height above the other creatures with which he peopled this earth. His own Son was "the Word," and to give man language was like admitting him to sonship. And speech, which he thus appropriated to man, he designed ever after to use as his great instrument in carrying on his purposes. It is through language alone that mind can act upon mind: if men could not communicate their ideas, they could not be agents in advancing the moral well being the one of the other. And is it not a surprising faculty, one which should more than any other commend itself to you as proceeding from God, the faculty by and through which I can at this moment throw my own soul into the breast of each member of this listening assembly, and give to every one of you a partnership in those thoughts which, so long as I keep silence, are buried from you as though in the very centre of the earth, and cause that there should pass into the deep solitudes of your spirits all that imagery, whether of the present or of the future, which is now rising from the busy workshop of my own intellect and my own imagination, and which, if I chose to seal up my lips, I might defy you to extract, though you came with engines of so vast a power that they could bring up the secrets of an unfathomed ocean. And when you remember that it is by and through speech that Christianity is propagated, so that the tongue is God's grand instrument for evangelizing nations, you will feel no surprise that we should claim a Divine origin for language, or that we should treat it as the distinguishing characteristic of our race. It is by the simple proclamation of a message that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is to be advanced upon earth; it is the preaching of the word which is generally honoured by God; the pulpit, rather than the press, is his engine for affecting conversion. "Go ye and preach the gospel," is the grand commission to the church; and though way may occasionally be made by laboured argument and ingenious illustration, yet, for the most part, when there is nothing more than the simple announcement of "Christ bare our sins in his own body on the tree," then is there achieved the greatest measure of success. The proud and hard spirits, which have stood out against logic and demonstration, fall before the plain and unvarnished proclamation, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help found." Thus it is not so much by man's understanding, or by man's genius, or by man's reason that God works; it is simply by his tongue. And intending thus to use language, God, we may believe, imparted it to man, making it that by which he should most serve his Maker, the distinguishing property of his race. Who, then, shall describe what we may call the dignity, the awfulness of a word? A word? It is but breath—a sound, lost as soon as heard: shall we be called to account for a thing so momentary, impalpable, and perishing? Ah! you may define a word by such terms as these; but if we have given you a true account of language, a word demands a loftier definition. To speak is to employ the noblest power, to call into action the most wondrous faculty with which man has been endowed; to speak is to assert the Divinely given superiority. A word is God's witness on my behalf that he designs me for communion with himself; and if I speak a light word, or an irreverent, or an idle, what am I doing but turning against the Giver, and prostituting to base uses the topmost property with which I have been equipped? And though the dishonour and the misapplication continue only through an imperceptible point of time, does not the costliness of the instrument give an infinite guiltiness to the least unfaithfulness? Just as if, supposing me lord over the grand laboratories of nature, I should direct in mere wantonness one flash of the lightning: you might not be able to mark a time so brief as that of the offence; but might not scathed forests and shrivelled corpses proclaim how greatly I had sinned?

It can be only, then, through want of reflection that we are surprised at the importance which the Bible attaches to speech, or to the announcement that men must give account for every idle word which they speak. You think it a great sin to prostitute reason and to misapply talent. It is; but after all, speech is man's grand and distinguishing endowment, and if, as is most obvious and reasonable, the nobler an abused faculty the greater the crime of the abuse, why may it not come to pass, that a sin of the tongue shall be more offensive in God's sight than a sin of the understanding or a sin of the judgment? Yes, you may expect a literal fulfilment of Christ's declaration—"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned;" and all surprise at the seemingly hard saying, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of judgment"—all surprise, I say, should give way before the emphatic questions of our text—"Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?"

But enough on the fact that language is of Divine original: we turn to the other fact announced in our text, that any one case of inability to speak is of Divine appointment. "Who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" You observe that God claims to himself a most distinct concern over every individual, so that it is the result of nothing but Divine interference, that one is born with a complete set of senses and faculties, and another with deficiencies and imperfections. We cannot, if such expression be lawful, we cannot mix up God too intimately with the affairs of this earth and its population. We know that when the seven days of creation were ended God rested from his work, and that he has never since put forth the producing energy by which he filled immensity with beauty and with life; but it were counter to a sound philosophy as to a correct theology to suppose, that when God had finished creation he abandoned it to itself, or to the working of expressed laws, either material or immaterial. He ceased to create, but he never ceased to actuate and sustain, and with as true an exertion of his Almightiness as when he produced worlds out of nothing is he continually operating on the surface of every planet, and in the recesses of every household, and in the secrecies of every heart; and you may be sure that we advance no overwrought statement when we assert, that those who know most of the wonders of the universe feel themselves compelled at every step to recognize the presence of a presiding and actuating God, and find the supposition of a Deity superintending the motion of every atom, and the growth of every leaf, and the conduct of every being, the only solid groundwork on which to base their philosophy. It is not true science which thinks that it can make way without God; true science, and that which has been successful science, loves to have God continually at its side, and in place of proceeding on the supposition that the system when constructed might, like clockwork, go on of itself, it finds direction and strength in the belief, that every wheel is turned and every lever moved by the distinct act of Omnipotence. So that you need never have a fear of bringing the creation, or any one of its departments, into a closer than its actual connection with Godhead. If you single out an individual, and place him in the most obscure and insignificant station, you will display as much of the philosopher as of the Christian when you hold, that there is not a mental power, and not a bodily sense, and not a sinew, and not a nerve belonging to this individual which has not been dealt to him under the inspection of God, and that there cannot happen to him the circumstance, whether it minister to his gladness or his grief, which is not as accurately ordered and superintended by the Almighty, as though he were the leader of the universe, and the fate of nations hung upon his nod. When we have once recognized the unwearied interference of God with human concerns, we are required to believe that the possession or the non-possession of a complete set of senses and faculties is matter in some way of Divine appointment, and that whether the infant shall come into the world with an eye that can collect the sunbeams, or with an ear that can receive the modulations of sound, and with organs adapted for the mysteries of speech, or whether it shall be shut out from all the glory of the landscape, and all communion with mankind, by imperfection in its equipment of powers, this is far enough from being undetermined or accidental. "Who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" The Psalmist expressed this sentiment, when he said, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; my substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret; thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." It is of God, as we are accustomed to acknowledge, that one man's talents exceed those of another, and that his genius is of a higher and more powerful order; but bodily differences are as truly of God's appointment as are mental; ay, and we believe that there shall be as strict a reckoning at the judgment with a beautiful woman for her beauty, as with a clever man for his ability; and if it shall be as a stern item in the open books against the man of lofty genius that he frittered away his talents, or employed them in the cause of vice or infidelity, so shall it be against the woman of great personal attractions, that she made her loveliness an altar for flattery, and studied so to set off her charms as to draw after her a crowd of admirers. We have nothing that we did not receive, and for all that we have received we shall be called to give account. God hath meted out to us our every endowment, whether of body or of mind; we are indebted for nothing to chance, for everything to Providence; and though it were beside our purpose to inquire into the reasons which may induce God to deny to one man the sense of sight, and to another the sense of hearing, we are as much bound to recognize his appointment in these bodily defects as in the splendid gifts of a capacious memory, a rich imagination and a sound judgment, which procure for their possessor admiration and influence; and when there shall come the grand clearing up of the mysteries and discrepancies of the present dispensation, we nothing doubt that the Almighty will show that there was a design to be answered by every deformed limb, and every sightless eyeball, and every speechless tongue, and that in regard both to the individual himself and to numbers with whom he stood associated, there has been a distinct reference to the noblest and most glorious of ends, in the closing up of the inlets of the senses, or in the yielding the members to disease or contraction. The deaf and dumb child shall be proved to have acted a part in the furtherance of the purposes of God, which it could never have performed, had it delighted its parents by hearkening to their counsels and pouring forth the music of its speech; the blind man and the cripple shall be shown to have been so placed in their pilgrimage through life, that they would have been decidedly disadvantaged, the one by sight, the other by strength. We may not be able in our present darkness to detect the design of the curtailment of each bodily sense or organ; but it is sufficient to know, that every such curtailment is ascribable to the appointment of God, and we know also that it answers ends that it could not otherwise have done. But you remember, "As Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Our Lord, you observe, manifestly implies, that there was an object Divinely proposed in this poor man's blindness. He had been born blind with a reference to the mighty miracle which Christ was about to work. "That the works of God should be made manifest in him." "Who maketh," then, "the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" Thine, O God, is the allowing upon earth the melancholy assemblage of those who seem but fractions of men; but wise and good, though unsearchable and past finding out, are all thy ways and all thy permissions.

And there are two inferences which you should draw from the facts thus established, and which we would press with all earnestness on your attention. You discern, first of all, the extreme sinfulness of looking slightingly or with contempt on those who are afflicted with any bodily defect or deformity. Ridicule in such case, however disguised and softened down, is ridicule of an appointment of God, and to despise in the least degree a man because he possesses not the full measure of senses and powers, is to revile the Creator who alone ordered the abstraction. This may have been in part the reason why so signal a vengeance overtook those children in Bethel who mocked Elisha, the prophet of the Lord, when "there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two of them." Their taunt to Elisha had been, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head." Whilst the bidding Elisha "go up" may have been a sarcastic and insolent reference to the ascent of Elijah, for whom had come down the chariots of fire and the horses of fire, the epithet "bald head" was probably a sneer at a bodily defect; and this, we say, may have helped to produce, and must be taken as helping to vindicate the terrible judgment which quickly ensued. When we rightly understand that it is God who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind, and therefore recognize the workings or discover the permission of the Almighty in a withered limb or a powerless organ, we perceive at once that defect and deformity claim our respect as much as perfectness and symmetry, and there seems but little cause for wonder, that when the children came out of Bethel, and in scorn and in mockery said to Elisha, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head," there rushed bears out of the wood, and slew of them forty and two. This, then, is our first inference—an inference as to the utter sinfulness of casting any slight on a person for any bodily defect.

But there is a second inference. If we are indebted to God for every sense and every faculty, are we not laid under a mighty obligation to present our bodies a living sacrifice to our Maker? I offer not this living sacrifice, if I allow the fires of an unhallowed passion to light up mine eye, if I lend mine ear to the whisperings of the scorner or the song of the voluptuous, if I give my tongue to malice, or slander, or vanity, or if I yield myself to intemperance, and thus make the body the sepulchre of the soul. We beseech you to do honour to the senses, remembering that they shall be hereafter, as they are here, the apparatus by which knowledge is gathered and poured into the spirit. The eye, is to collect the lustres of Deity: shall I turn it on what is impure, and allow it to gaze on the objects of concupiscence? The ear, is to listen to the harpings of angels: shall I permit it to be defiled by the ribaldries of the licentious, the impiety of the blasphemer, or the insinuations of the slanderer? And above all, the tongue, the noblest of my members, the distinguishing gift of God—"Who hath made man's mouth? have not I, the Lord?"—with this I am to swell the sublime hallelujah, and proclaim in the sanctuary of the skies the worthiness of the Lamb: shall it, then, be clothed with the foolish jest, with the frivolous badinage, with the hollow flattery, with the detractions of scandal, with the burnings of envy? "If any man," saith St. James, "offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body." "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness and wisdom." "He that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile." I must give, then, if I would act up to what Scripture requires—I must give vast attention to the tongue. I must not say with the wicked in the Psalm, "Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?"—but rather pray with David, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." But if I would regulate the tongue I must regulate the heart. "How can ye being evil speak good things?" saith the Lord; "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" and if, then, ye would honour God by speech, ye must see that ye surrender to him the fervour of the affections. Let the soul live in communion with God, and your speech will be "always with grace, seasoned with salt." Speech is but a child or index of thought; and he who muses much on what is high and holy will discourse but little on what is vain and trifling. It is a poor ambition—let this be observed and remembered more especially by the young—it is a poor ambition and a dangerous power, that of talking wittily. A sharp repartee, a brilliant raillery, an off-hand declamation, a pungent satire—these may keep a company amused; but as a general rule, he who says what the world calls a good thing is the worse for saying it? The laughter with which he is rewarded too often does the part of an earthquake; the more he is applauded the less firm will he be in the love of truth, in respect for religion, in awe of God, and the more disposed to sacrifice to new merriment all that is conscientious, and solemn, and reverential. There would be less need to guard you in this matter, if none aimed at being distinguished in conversation but those who succeed. The evil is, that for one who has the ability there are hundreds who have the ambition. May God make you all careful of your tongue! It were a good thing to ask ourselves, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?" And to follow up the question by another—"Did the Lord make it for the purpose to which I am now applying it?" If we are earnest in putting such questions, faithful in answering them, and diligent in acting on the answer, we may hope to make that sacrifice demanded of us in Scripture, to render unto God "the calves of our lips."

THE INDESCRIBABLENESS OF HEAVEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 2, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's.)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."—2 Corinthians xii. 7.

THE apostle had just been giving a revelation of an extraordinary vision with which he had been favoured—of a trance, or ecstasy, or rapture, for it is difficult to know which term to select, which was instrumental in affording him such views of the heavenly state as were perhaps never granted to any of our race on this side the grave. It is a narrative which, if it had been met with in any other book but the Bible, would have been regarded as fabulous —the tale of an enthusiast who had deceived himself, or of an impostor who sought to deceive others. St. Paul declares that fourteen years before, whether in the body he could not tell, or whether out of the body he could not tell, he had been caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful for a man to utter; and then in our text you find that for the purpose of keeping him humble, of preventing his being puffed up at so signal a mark of the favour of God, he was visited with some affliction, probably some bodily infirmity, which he describes as "a thorn in the flesh" —something by which he was sorely and continually distressed. It will be difficult to follow out all the trains of thought readily suggested by these several facts; we will not attempt to define them by any formal statement; but come with us, and let us consider, without further preface, what may be learned from the remarkable assertions of our text and the context.

Now, first of all, it is of great importance to observe, that St. Paul was the subject of immediate revelations; for this stamps a dignity on his writings which should secure for them our most profound reverence. I do not know that a tendency which at one time was strong in the church has been altogether destroyed—the tendency to depreciate the epistles of the New Testament in comparison of the gospels, as though the gospels, because they contain the words of Christ himself, were worthy of greater credit and attention than the epistles, which contain only the words of the apostles. There could not be a more unfounded nor a more dangerous theory. The New Testament is in the strictest sense a progressive book. Our Lord's preaching was only that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; and accordingly it would not be easy to frame from his discourses alone a full and consistent account of the great scheme of human redemption. He left it for his apostles, when they had received the illuminating influences of the promised Comforter, to state and to expand the grand doctrines of Christianity, and now to set the gospels above the epistles is not, as may vainly be pretended, to magnify Christ in comparison of his disciples, the Master in comparison of the servant; it is rather to depreciate the Third Person in the Trinity, as compared with the Second, making what the Spirit inspired inferior to what the Son uttered. But whilst this, as a general statement, should suffice to counteract the tendency to which we have referred, it should add greatly to our reverence for the writings of St Paul, that they are the writings of a man unto whom were vouchsafed immediate revelations—revelations so great, as you learn from our text, that they required to be counterpoised by distressing visitations. You will find, in his Epistle to the Galatians, he himself lays great stress upon this. In maintaining that the gospel which he had preached was not after man, he affirms—"For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." So that, however true it may be that the great doctrines of the atonement, of the corruption of our nature, of election, of justification by faith, and the like, though clearly stated in the epistles, are but faintly shadowed out in the gospels, there is no reason on this account for considering them as less the doctrines of Christ, seeing that the apostle in whose writings they are most fully expounded taught only what he received by revelation from the Saviour; and when you have thus made his having been the subject of immediate revelation a reason why St. Paul's writings should be of equal weight with the discourses of Christ, our text evidently acquires importance, as adding to the proofs of the direct communications with which he was favoured.

But we will not insist further upon this. We will not treat of revelations in general, but rather confine ourselves to the one which is referred to in the passage before us; and we think that something very admirable is to be inferred as to the character of St. Paul. It was a most extraordinary mark of Divine favour which this apostle had received, greater, it might be almost said, than had been vouchsafed to Enoch and Elijah. These worthies of earlier dispensations had indeed been admitted without seeing death into the presence of God, and marvellous was the privilege which thus recompensed their piety; but with them there was no return to earth; they were eminently distinguished and blessed in the way in which life concluded, but they had not the singular honour of being translated to gaze on their portion before the moment arrived for taking possession. This was the privilege of St. Paul, that he had been in heaven, though he was still upon earth—that he had visited his inheritance and looked upon its lustre, long before the toils were concluded from which that inheritance should be won. And what was to have been expected from any being of like passions with ourselves, but that he would have dwelt with something of exultation on the unparalleled token of the favour of God, and have referred to it in his intercourse with other followers of Christ, as warranting a confidence which none else could entertain? That there was a danger of his being puffed up, is evident from our text; and the "thorn in the flesh" may seem to you to make it less surprising that he should have kept so long silence—"fourteen years"—in regard of his vision; but to me it appears to make the wonder greater. The "thorn in the flesh," as we have already said, was probably some bodily infirmity which exposed the apostle to contempt and derision; for he thus describes himself to the Corinthians—"I Paul, who in presence am base among you." "In presence:" that is, as you find it in your marginal reading, in outward appearance. And in writing to the Galatians he gives as one great evidence of their earnest faith and devotedness, that they had not been prejudiced against him by his outward appearance. "And my temptation which was in the flesh ye despised not nor rejected." So that as a counterbalance to his having been caught up into Paradise, there was fastened on him some bodily weakness or defect, which was calculated to excite what with most men is the hardest thing to bear—the ridicule of those with whom he associated. And what more natural, than that when thus exposed to ridicule he should have appealed to the cause or origin of his infirmity, and so have sheltered himself from derision by affirming the signal honour of which the infirmity was the token? St. Paul was keenly alive to all the inconveniences of his "thorn in the flesh." He expressly records, that he besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him; but he did not, as perhaps any other christian would have done—he did not, when he found his infirmity was not to be removed, take refuge in the honour which had entailed the infirmity, and use it to the turning all ridicule into reverence; and we do think that in nothing is St. Paul more admirable than in this. He had borne his infirmity into scenes of surprising danger and difficulty. It is only in the chapter preceding that which contains our text that he gives a marvellous catalogue of his perils and labours—a catalogue which may be said to omit no human risk and no human hardship; and there is no more affecting article in the catalogue than this—"In perils among false brethren." "False brethren" are classed, you see, with "robbers," and with "the sea" —as though the treachery of a professed friend were terrible as the worst onset of furious elements, or desperate enemies. But these "false brethren," as appears from the chapter before us, were to be most successfully resisted by the history of his being caught up into heaven. It is for the purpose of putting down false brethren that St. Paul is at length, after fourteen years, moved to its mention. And yet he had gone up and down the world, everywhere forming churches, everywhere harassed by the "thorn in the flesh" —everywhere "in perils among false brethren;" but nevertheless he had been silent as to his rapture into heaven. When first mentioning it, he mentions it as having occurred fourteen years ago. Nothing had been able to move him to what might look like boasting. Oh! if I wanted proof that St. Paul was worthy of the signal honour which has been granted to none other, I should draw it from his having concealed through long years that honour from the world. If it were more than a human portion to have been caught up into Paradise, it seems more than a human forbearance to have abstained from its mention; and the great apostle of the Gentiles, wonderful as he is on many occasions and in many positions—wonderful, as he throws himself into the combat with idolatry, and meets a world single-handed—wonderful, as he stands before Agrippa, and half persuades the proud king to be a Christian—wonderful, as he rises on Mar's Hill, and awes into silence and almost conviction the philosophy of Greece—wonderful, as he toils as a tent-maker, the worker of miracles, earning his bread by the drudgery of an artificer—wonderful, in the hour of shipwreck, a kind of guardian angel to a terrified crew—is yet more wonderful, as we gaze on him, despised because of an infirmity, or derided because of a defect, yet never moved to the confounding his revilers, by mentioning the honour which had been put upon him by God. Yes, it is with awe and veneration that I look on the apostle, as he plants the cross in various lands, braves a thousand perils, and achieves a thousand victories; but never do I find him so spiritually great, so free from the dross of human corruption, so elevated because so humble, so superior to his fellow Christians, because so able to control the strongest feelings of our nature, as when I find that he had to speak of "fourteen years ago," when speaking of privileges so unusual and so great, that "a messenger of Satan" had been sent to buffet him, lest he "should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation."

Now, you thus perceive that St. Paul is displayed to us under an admirable point of view, as having so long concealed the honour which he had received, and which was exactly fitted to silence and put to shame those who reviled and despised him. But you may say, 'We have not so much to do with St. Paul's long silence as with his tardy avowal. Let us be thankful that he broke silence at last, and that he did not leave the world without mention of his having been caught up to the third heaven, and of what he there heard and saw. It was no inconsiderable revelation with which he was favoured. The expression in our text is very strong: "The abundance of the revelations." He can hardly give us any account of his having been in Paradise which shall not be full of interest and instruction.' This is indeed a most natural expectation on your part. You are eager to sit at the feet of the apostle, so soon as you know that he is at length ready to communicate his vision, and you feel no doubt that he will give you such accounts of the invisible world as an eye-witness alone can have power to furnish. That at the very first setting up of Christianity so distinguished an apostle should be admitted to Paradise, and then sent back to the earth, did not this seem like sending the spies into Canaan, that they might carry to the Israelites a report of the country?—and it might have been expected, that as the spies returned laden with the fruit of the land, and able to testify that it was indeed a rich heritage which the Lord had promised to Abraham and his seed, so would the apostle have brought with him evidence that heaven was well worthy every struggle and every endurance. But unless this evidence lie in the fact that what St. Paul heard were "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter," the expectation is altogther disappointed. The apostle returns, maintains for fourteen years a perfect silence as to what had occurred, and then only states that he could communicate nothing. You may imagine the church gathering round him, eager to receive from the lips of one who had actually passed through the veil, tidings as to what the joys were which God had reserved for Christ's faithful followers; but he has no information to give. The church hearkens in vain for animated descriptions, and must still be content with brief intimations and assurances, which address themselves exclusively to faith.

And yet you are not to think that the church gains nothing from the record of the rapture of St. Paul. I own indeed that at first sight there is something very dispiriting in the narrative. You hear the text: it speaks of "the abundance of the revelations:" you turn eagerly to what has gone before, in hopes of hearing those revelations, and you find St. Paul simply recording the fact, that he had been caught up to the third heaven, and that he had there heard unspeakable words, which it was not lawful for a man to utter. But do not go away in sorrow and disappointment: perhaps there is something, perhaps there is much to be learned from these unspeakable words, and though they cannot come to us in clear human utterance, they may probably in their mysterious silence be full of importance and significance. For you will observe that in the margin the word "possible" is substituted for "lawful." This is probably the more correct translation. The apostle did not so much mean to say that it would have been unlawful for him to have uttered what he had heard and seen, just as though God had laid a prohibition upon him, as that it would have been impossible, peculiar faculties having been given that he might be capable of beholding the beatific vision, but these faculties having been withdrawn on his return to the earth, he having no power to describe what he had no longer the power to perceive. And therefore you are to consider it as affirmed by St. Paul that heavenly joys are actually indescribable—that it comes not within the compass of language to make them intelligible to us in our present condition. And we may regard this as one great reason why the Scripture notices with respect to futurity are so brief and so general, stimulating the curiosity but never gratifying it. The words of Paradise are actually "unspeakable." We want as yet the capacities for heaven; and of what avail, then, would be any effort to make it comprehensible? But here the question presses, whether such a statement as that of St. Paul do not convey a higher idea of the Paradise of God than could have been furnished by descriptions which brought it within the compass of our thoughts—whether a communication which states that the words heard were words which it is impossible to utter do not amply merit the description of our text, "the abundance of the revelations." We admit that one of the difficulties—and you must all feel it—with which we have to contend in working out salvation arises from the indistinctness of our apprehensions of heaven. It seems as though it would be far easier to fix the affections on things above, if those things so addressed themselves to our present feelings and susceptibilities that there could be no dispute as to their excellence and their fitness for such beings as ourselves. But when we come to ponder and weigh, we may perhaps find that nothing ought to be so animating as the confessed impossibility of our comprehending heaven. That heaven is not to be described, what description should be so encouraging as this? Consider heaven under two points of view—as a scene where we are to possess higher faculties, and as a scene where we shall have purer enjoyments—and let us see whether in each case it ought not to be a great stimulant to our hopes, that the words which St. Paul heard were unspeakable words.

First of all, heaven is a scene where we shall possess higher faculties. You are perhaps but little aware, through not having seriously reflected, how weak and how limited are the powers even of those who are most distinguished by mental superiority. What little way has been made by the most successful in discovery! How small a proportion does knowledge bear to ignorance! The man who advances farthest in science is the most conscious that he has barely entered the field; it is only he who has taken but few strides that exults in his progress; when he has really pressed onward he will be confounded at seeing what still lies beyond. And this arises from the fact, that our faculties for gathering in knowledge are few and feeble. With respect to what is material we are almost confined to the surfaces of things; we detect properties and register effects, but causes escape our sagacity; we ascertain a few of the connexions between substances, but the connecting links almost entirely surpass our comprehension. And with regard to what is spiritual our faculties may be said to make no way whatever; we can form no idea of what spirit is; we describe it by what it is not; and though every one is conscious of having a soul, we are all of us quite in the dark as to what a soul is. We feel, therefore, that a main part of our change, when we have put on immortality, will be a change in our faculties, the present being marvellously strengthened, and new ones imparted. But who among you can conjecture what those new faculties will be? Just take the case of the bodily senses. Who can form the idea of a being with more than five senses? We cannot imagine a sixth sense. Yet it would have been the same, had we been constructed with but four; we should not have been able to have imagined that fifth of which we are in possession. The man born blind has no conception of how ideas can be acquired through such a sense as that of seeing, and if enabled to see he cannot for a long time turn the new power to good account. What, then, is to prevent that there might be a greater number of senses, each opening such avenues to communication with external things as are now afforded us through the eye or the ear? In the Book of Revelation the four living creatures are represented as "full of eyes before and behind;" and this may be an intimation of great addition to those powers which now make the body the soul's chief instrument in the acquisition of knowledge. Every pore, so to speak, may become as a new sense, through which the soul may communicate with the creation of God. But, as we before said, we are wholly unable to conceive of a new sense; you must have the sense before you can understand, before you can even imagine what it is. And so also with your mental faculties; the mind may be put in possession of new powers, as the body of new senses, and truth, in its height and depth, may be explored and grasped by processes widely differing from those to which we are confined whilst on earth; but it is evident that no one can imagine these new faculties of the mind, any more than the new senses of the body. "It doth not," saith St. John, "yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." And is this matter of complaint? On the contrary, is not this matter of exultation? We believe that we are to be creatures with faculties for knowledge and capacities for happiness immeasurably transcending those now in our possession; but if these faculties and capacities were already quite intelligible, they would be only the present ones strengthened and amplified. New faculties and capacities must from their very nature be unintelligible till communicated. Am I, then, desirous to know what I shall be? Am I grieved at not being told what I shall be? If I could know and if I could be told, why, I must hereafter be a creature with as few inlets for knowledge and as few capacities for enjoyment as here. The very fact of my being able to anticipate would be convincing evidence against my being appointed to a lofty place amongst the orders of creation. Then it is the indistinctness of the future which is its glory. Of all cheering and encouraging things the chief should be, that we cannot yet know what will be our future portion. This confirms our boldest hope, this warrants our loftiest aspiration. Then let an apostle be caught up to the third heaven, and there let him be spectator of the condition of "the spirits of just men made perfect;" let him be privileged with a full revelation, with an actual inspection of the characteristics our nature, when body and soul shall be alike admitted into the presence of God; and when this apostle returns to the earth, we all gather round him, that we may hear the rich tidings which he brings. He has conversed with the glorified; they have told him what they are, as compared with what they were; and now let him communicate the intelligence, that we too may know what we shall be after death. Would the tale gratify us? Would it animate us that the visitant to the celestial world should be able to relate to us all that he had heard, and that in language conveying to us most definite ideas he should enlarge on the state of the redeemed, unfold their splendours and describe their powers? If this would please us, our pleasure evidently is, that our future greatness should be diminished in order that it may not exceed our present comprehension. No, rather let the apostle maintain a strict silence; only let him tell us that he is silent because it is impossible that he should speak; for if we would have exalted notions of a glorified man, of the station which he occupies and the faculties which he possesses, they must be the notions which are gained by ineffectual efforts to represent and delineate. The splendour which so dazzles us that we cannot look upon it, the vastness which we cannot grasp, the images for which there are no terms in human speech, these are our best images of heaven. St. Paul, then, gave a most animating account, when he declared that he had heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter," and that the revelation could not be communicated. This suffices to prove to me that, as it is stated in our text, there was an abundance of revelation, which rendered necessary "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan," to prevent an apostle from being "exalted above measure."

Now, my brethren, suppose we consider heaven not only as a scene where we shall possess higher faculties, but also as a scene where we shall have purer enjoyments; and we believe that under this point of view, as well as under the former, it is the indescribableness of heaven which should give it its attractiveness. As our faculties will be changed, so also will be our enjoyments; and if our celestial powers are not even to be imagined, neither in measure are our celestial enjoyments. It admits of very little question, that even the best amongst Christians are perplexed rather than encouraged by the accounts which Scripture sometimes gives of heavenly felicity. They cannot quite feel that this felicity is exactly adapted to their nature, and they are conscious that at least they must still be the subjects of some great moral change, before they can find blessedness in what must constitute it hereafter. Who of us, for example, can profess to feel that it must be happiness to be so swallowed up in God, to have God so literally all in all, that we shall desire nothing and delight in nothing except on account of its reference to him? With our present sympathies and sensibilities we cannot be happy whilst we know that any dear to us are unhappy; but hereafter it must be quite different. Parents will know that children, children will know that parents, are suffering eternal punishment; and yet, because God is all in all, those in heaven will be perfectly happy; yea, all will join in the anthem which shall commemorate God as glorious in the overthrow of the wicked. At present this is a great mystery; it is evident that we could not be happy now in the way in which we are to be happy hereafter, and it becomes, therefore, a matter of faith, rather than one of feeling, that we shall find blessedness in the blessedness of heaven. This is just one proof that the joys of the redeemed are incomprehensible; even when their nature is affirmed, we find the faculty wanting by which they can be appreciated. And other proofs might be easily furnished. When we read of the occupations of glorified beings—of their casting their crowns before the throne, of their "resting not day nor night, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord"—of their singing a new song, of their standing with harps in their hands on a sea of glass mingled with fire—why should we affect to deny that the accounts do not accord very closely with our own conceptions of happiness, and that the representations are not such as address themselves powerfully to the desires even of the spiritually minded? And even when we have gorgeous descriptions of the celestial city—descriptions of it as builded of all that is costly and brilliant—who can avoid feeling that it is not the pearl and the gold which can make a man happy, and that therefore there is but little way made towards an actual exhibition of the happiness of heaven by the exhibition of the brilliancy of the precious metals and jewels? We confess, therefore, that with all the descriptions that can be obtained from the page of revelation we can form no satisfactory, no definite idea of the future happiness of the saints. But what of this? It is this which is the finest testimony to the greatness of our happiness. I know why St. John rifles the material universe of its riches, and builds them into his model of the New Jerusalem; it is not to lead me to think that these riches are the glory of that city. Creation is exhausted, only that I may learn that it furnishes nothing adequate to represent the dwelling place of God. It would be but a poor heaven which such beings as you or I could understand or appreciate. Give me the majestic cloud, the mysterious veil, the mighty shadows which recede as we advance, filling the mind with amazement, but forbidding us to approach and examine what they are. I wish to be defeated in every endeavour to comprehend futurity; I wish, when I have climbed to the highest pinnacle to which thought can soar, to be compelled to confess that I have not yet reached the base of the everlasting hills. There is something surprisingly glorious in this baffling of the imagination. It is vain that I task myself to conceive of heaven; but it is a noble truth that it is vain. That heaven is inconceivable is the most august, the most animating discovery. It tells me that I have not yet the power for enjoying heaven; but this is only to tell me, that the beholding God face to face, the being for ever with the Lord, requires the exaltation of my nature; and I triumph in the assurance that what is reserved for me pre-supposes that I be mightily advanced in the scale of creation. If I dare rate one portion of Scripture above another, I prefer the record of the vision of St. Paul to the record of the visions of St. John. Wonderful indeed were the manifestations vouchsafed to the exile in Patmos; the spirit of the coldest must glow, as the beloved disciple delineates what he saw,—the tree of life, the crystal river, the white-robed multitude, the glittering city; but the attempt to describe seems to assume the possibility of description, and to prove to me that heaven might be described would be to prove to me that its glory was not transcendent and its happiness not unbounded. If, therefore, I am more moved by the silence of St.

Paul than by the poetry of St. John, the truth is, that St. Paul was yet more highly favoured than St. John. St. John remained on earth; he was not caught up into Paradise, and the splendid trains which swept by him in his ecstasy or trance were so constructed and clothed as to be adapted to a human comprehension. But St. Paul saw the reality of heaven; no dim figure, no imperfect type, but heaven as it actually is, heaven as it will appear to the righteous, when permitted to behold the "King in his beauty." And hence it is not strange that St. Paul must be silent, though St. John had marvel upon marvel to relate. I turn from the one to the other, and though fascinated by the spectacle of a land where no night gathers, and into which no pain enters, and whose temple is the Lord God Almighty, I learn more, and I grow more hopeful, and I am more environed by the majesty of the future, when I find St. Paul declaring that he had "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Yes, I go to the apostle, when he returns from his heavenly sojourn, to hear tidings of a kingdom prepared for the saints; and just because all he can tell me is that he cannot—that it is not possible for him to reveal what he saw—therefore do I feel that there must have been disclosed to him the magnificent glories of the invisible state—that consequently the disclosure was precisely such as might have been expected to elate and to puff him up; and thus there is full vindication of what is stated in the text. There was given to him "a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations."

If we may not hope to be caught up with St. Paul into Paradise, at least let us strive to rise on the wings of faith, and catch some glimpses of our inheritance. His view of heaven had wondrously animated the apostle. Witness the readiness to depart which breathed throughout his writings. How he speaks of being absent from the body, of finishing his course with joy, of there being laid up for him a crown of righteousness, of his having a desire to depart and to be with Christ? One glance at heaven made him weary of earth, except as a scene in which he might glorify God. And so let it be with us. If we dwelt much in thought on the glories reserved for us above, how insignificant would seem the cares, how inconsiderable the labours, how worthless the attractions of earth! It is when the future is shut out that the present dilates—that its troubles seem overwhelming and its pleasures enchanting. Embrace two worlds, and the one will be presently almost lost in the other. Be this, then, the great lesson which we derive from our subject of discourse. "The things which God hath prepared for them that love him" are things which, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," neither hath the human heart conceived. But faith and hope may both be strengthened by this very impossibility of our forming just ideas of heaven. It is the loftiness of the mountain which causes it to be lost in the clouds. We will animate ourselves, then, by the thought, that thought itself cannot measure our everlasting portion. We may be sure that the more we dwell on the magnificent reward, the more intent shall we be in working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

EXCOMMUNICATION—SHOULD IT NOT BE REVIVED?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 9, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

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AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."—1 Corinthians v. 3—5.

THE Apostle is here referring, as you will probably recollect, to a case of gross immorality, which had been allowed to pass unrebuked by the Corinthian church. That church, led away by false teachers, prided itself on the possession of showy gifts, but was little attentive to the securing amongst its members the graces of the gospel. The offender in the present instance was one whose flagrant licentiousness would have drawn on him the rebukes even of a heathen community; so that his unworthiness to remain within the Christian communion could have been doubted by none. If, then, there were ever a case for the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, this was one which ought by universal consent to have demanded a prompt and a stern interference. And yet nothing had been done by the church; and the tidings of the circumstances having reached St. Paul, he proceeded at once, as you read in our text, to prescribe and demand the immediate ejectment of the incestuous person. The phrase which the Apostle employs—"to deliver such an one unto Satan"—indicates expulsion from the Christian communion. A man so expelled could no longer be considered a Christian, but a heathen, a subject of the kingdom of Satan. The same phrase is used in another place, and with a similar meaning. "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is Hymeneas and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." In the case of the Corinthian offender St. Paul seems to have expected that the sentence of excommunication would be followed by some miraculous infliction of pain and disease, the wasting or even the death of the body; for he speaks, you observe, of "delivering such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh." Yet even though it might be followed by so terrible a result, the act of excommunication would contemplate only the good of the offender. He was to be delivered "unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus;" or, as it is in the other instance, "delivered unto Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme." The excommunication might be instrumental to the leading him to repentance, and the mortification of his fleshly lusts, and thus subserve his escape from future and final punishment.

We have now, however, sufficiently adverted to the peculiar circumstances of the case before us, and may therefore proceed to those more general lessons and illustrations which are furnished by the words of our text. You need not for the present think either of the crime or of the punishment of the Corinthian offender : we are simply about to show you, that truths of great practical worth, applicable to all times and all churches, may be derived from the direction of the apostle, to "deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Now, you will all readily admit, that it must have been greatly for the honour and the advantage of the Corinthian church, that so notorious an offender as this incestuous person should be openly removed from its communion; for this it is, as we have explained to you, that you must understand by the being delivered unto Satan. He was excommunicated—cut off for a time from the visible body of Christ, so as not to be allowed to join in the prayers or to participate in the rights of the church. And no one can fail to see that what was true in the earlier days of such a man as this offender is true in our own days of numbers who bring disgrace on the Christian name; their public expulsion from the church would tend mightily to the strength and the glory of the church. And we wish now to direct your attention to a fact which seems almost forgotten by the generality of men, but which is necessary to the vindication of the ecclesiastical body to which we belong—namely, that the services of our church are constructed on the principle that the power of excommunication is yet resident amongst us, and that when called for such power will be promptly exerted. You all know, for example, what objections are raised against our burial service, on the ground of its expressing in all cases a hope of a glorious resurrection, whosoever may be the party over whom it is read. These solemn words are to be uttered by the minister, as every body is lowered into the grave—"Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground ; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust ; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ ;" and though it is often pleaded by those who defend our ritual against the dissenter, that it is not the resurrection unto eternal life of the individual thus consigned to the grave, but the general doctrine of the resurrection of the righteous in which so confident a hope is here expressed by the church, yet we are free to allow that we think this is hardly fair, but that the words do assert an expectation, or a charitable belief that the man or the woman over whom the words are pronounced will come forth hereafter unto the resurrection of life. And yet the man or the woman may have been notoriously heretical or notoriously profligate, and may have died in such open contempt of God that even charity itself, which hopes against hope, must feel that what the minister utters is altogether inapplicable. If there be no case in which we ought to pronounce a man lost, there must be many in which we ought not to show an expectation of his being saved. This is certainly true ; and you are not to think that it is without a strong feeling of repugnance that the parochial minister occasionally uses the reprobated words. When the coffin before him contains, for example, the body of a drunkard or adulterer, and all those who stand around him in the churchyard know that the departed man lived and died in flagrant immorality, you are not to think that he experiences no pain in using the language which the church puts into his mouth. And why, then, does the church prescribe such language ? Why direct that words expressive of hope should be breathed over persons of whose salvation it is impossible to be hopeful ? The simple reply is, that the church never intended that the words in question should be used over such persons. The direction prefixed to the service for the burial of the dead is, that "the office ensuing is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands on themselves ;" and under the head "excommunicate" ought these notorious offenders to have been included. Had not ecclesiastical discipline fallen into decay, they would have been publicly removed from the communion of the church, when their vices had been publicly known; and then, had they died before giving such signs of genuine repentance as would warrant the spiritual ruler in receiving them back, they would have died "excommunicate," and the minister would never have been required to commit their bodies to the ground in the "sure and certain hope of a resurrection unto life." It is altogether because one great and wholesome ordinance of the church has through the degeneracy of the times become virtually obsolete, that one part of her ritual is so often inappropriate. She never designed that ritual to be used over such a man as this Corinthian offender; she so arranged her internal economy, that this offender would be necessarily excluded from her membership, and so have no claim to the rites which she designed for none but those who died within her pale. And in place of making it a charge against the church, that her officiating minister has words put into his mouth which he cannot use with truth, we ought rather to make it a charge against ourselves that we have grown so impatient of restraint, and so averse to all discipline, that the church can no longer wield the powers which were given her for her own purification, but must allow those to remain outwardly her members of whom even charity cannot hope that they are heirs of the kingdom. The case is not one which would be met by an alteration in the ritual, but by an actual endeavour at the restoration of discipline. There is no defect in the ritual, for the ritual expresses no more than should be charitably expressed of those whose practice is not openly at variance with the Christian profession, and over none others was it ever intended that our service for the burial of the dead was ever to be used. But if you would go on to argue, that forasmuch as the temper of the times imperatively forbids the restoration of ecclesiastical discipline, this part of the Prayer Book should be altered, and brought more into keeping with the existing circumstances of the church, why, we disagree with you entirely, and would deprecate any change as decidedly pernicious. Would you have the words so pared down and modified, that they should be equally applicable whether to the righteous or to the unrighteous who is consigned to the grave? Then what becomes of the consolation which the church is bound to administer, when there is good ground for hope? Who that has seen how the tears of the mourners have been dried, when, remembering the piety of the brother or the sister whom they have borne to the long home, they have caught the inspiriting words of our service, would desire to have that service clipped of all its glorious anticipations, and so made as appropriate over the grave of the Corinthian offender as over that of St. Paul or St. John? Or would you, which seems the only other alternative—would you recommend that a discretionary power be lodged with the officiating minister, that he might omit certain expressions when he judged them inapplicable? Why, what could be more trying, what more disastrous to the minister, than the having such a power? The churchyard would become a place of judgment, where he must take upon himself to pronounce sentence upon his parishioners. His decisions, however carefully given, would be canvassed and arraigned, and praised and abused: if he leant to the side of charity he might encourage the wicked to the living in their wickedness, and if he were to draw a more severe line he might be filling with unutterable anguish a family who had no cause to sorrow as those who had no hope; and thus from the scene and act of burial might there originate feuds, and strifes, and heart-burnings and disquietudes that would keep a parish in constant agitation, and peradventure interfere with the minister's usefulness. No, no; the services of our church are constructed on a principle which alone ought to be recognized by the visible body of Christ—that they are to be used by and for none whose outward conduct is so openly at variance with the Christian profession that charity itself is unable to regard them as believers in Christ; and for the removal of all such from her circle the church, as we have said, has amply provided, and it would be done, if her enactments, once so carefully obeyed, were again to be brought into active operation. Such being the case, at least let us learn to judge our church's services by their fitness for the state of things for which they were designed, and which only our own contempt of authority has hopelessly banished; and if any portion of those services appear to suppose such a freedom in the ecclesiastical body from open impiety, and such a general diffusion of outward conformity to the precepts of religion as it would be idle to look for in our present condition, let us, in place of condemning the services as therefore unsuitable, see whether they would not square admirably with the church which wielded the power that was wielded by St. Paul, when he delivered the offender "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Now, there would appear to have been in the primitive church two kinds, or rather, two degrees of excommunication, the lesser and the greater. The lesser debarred a man from the privileges of the Lord's Supper, but allowed him to join the congregation in other portions of their spiritual exercises. This lesser excommunication was put in force against less notorious offenders, in the hope that, serving as an admonition, it might lead them to repentance, and prevent the necessity for yet severer measures. But the greater excommunication cut a man off altogether from the church, forbidding him to participate in any of its services, so that he became accounted, in the language of our Lord, "a heathen and a publican." Of course it is only in flagrant cases that the ecclesiastical rulers passed the sentence of this greater excommunication; but the grossly immoral and the openly heretical were always considered subjects for this highest church censure; so that the Christian community was secured against the anomaly which now exposes it to ridicule and to scorn—the anomaly of having numbers within its pale, and with full access to its mysteries, whose lives would be a scandal even to Paganism. And there can be no doubt that it is the greater excommunication, the separation of the sinner from all Christian fellowship, which is spoken of in our text. It may be indeed that it was more than even this; the apostles may have had and used a power of delivering offenders to Satan, in the sense of giving them over to that evil spirit, to be tormented by him in body and soul; but at all events this delivery unto Satan included the being cut off from the church, and our wish is now to take it as the definition of excommunication, and so to draw from it lessons of no small worth to ourselves.

You will remember that St. Paul, pleading in bonds before Agrippa, described himself as having been sent by God to turn men "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;" so that he defined those who belonged not to the Christian church as under the power of Satan; and the same apostle speaks yet more explicitly in the Epistle to the Colossians—"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son;" representing the world as the kingdom of Satan, who is indeed elsewhere styled "the god of this world, and the church as the kingdom of Christ." There is an exact agreement between these representations and that in our text, where the being excommunicated is spoken of as being delivered to Satan; and the church, as the kingdom of Christ, being spoken of in opposition to the world as the kingdom of Satan, it follows that those who were cast out of the church were given over to the world as the kingdom of Satan; and this, you will observe, is a conclusion reached on Scriptural authority, by a comparison of different texts, without any reference to one uninspired interpretation. And if it be the testimony of St. Paul, that to be cut off by ecclesiastical censures from the communion of the visible church was the same thing as being delivered unto Satan, this latter phrase can denote nothing less than the being especially subjected to the assaults of the prince of evil spirits, deprived of the assistance through which they might be withstood. The excommunicated parties retained the privileges of baptism, for of these the church judged it impossible to deprive them, so that if they lived to be restored to her fellowship they were never re-baptized; and they had the private means of grace, such as prayer and fasting and the study of the Word; but because they might not feed on the body and blood of our Redeemer in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they were accounted as delivered unto Satan, so forlorn was their state, and so fearfully were they considered to be exposed to the machinations of our great adversary the devil. And what say you, men and brethren, to such a view of the importance of the public ordinances of grace as is thus presented to you? Not, again and again be it observed, on the authority of any human interpretation or conjecture, but on the express warrant of an apostle of Christ? What say those of you who only occasionally come to the preaching of the word—what say those of you who never attend at the table of the Lord, or who attend but seldom, on certain high festivals and solemnities, if the literal excommunication from the church would be tantamount to the being delivered unto Satan? How far short of this may come that voluntary excommunication, of which such numbers on all sides must be regarded as the subjects? The great injuriousness of the literal excommunication would lie in the separation of the excommunicated persons from the public means of grace, and this separation may be as complete through what we call the voluntary excommunication—the absenting yourselves from ordinances in which the church yet grants you the power of participation. We know too well that many are ready to separate the growth of piety from external ordinances, as though the private reading of God's word might be as effectual as the public hearing, and grace might be as much expected through the devout remembering of Christ's death in the closet as through its sacrificial commemoration at the altar of the church; but we need nothing but our text to set against these latitudinarian notions, and we set it in all the consciousness that its testimony is too strong to be overborne or cast aside. In the judgment of St. Paul it was to deliver a man to Satan to exclude him altogether from the public assembly, so that he might not pray with the people, nor hear sermons, nor receive the holy communion. When that great apostle, on account of the foul deed which he heard of in Corinth, arose in the indignation and strength of one whom Christ set to guard the flock, and directed that the offending party should be cast out from the church—cast out, so that for him there would be no more solemn gatherings, and no more spreadings of the mystic supper—he felt that he made such an alteration in that man's condition as amounted to a transporting him from the kingdom of Christ to the power of darkness. And there seems no way of avoiding the inference from this,—that in and through the public ordinances of grace are we chiefly to look for such assistances from above as will make us superior to the wiles and assaults of the devil, and that by the neglect of those ordinances you take the readiest mode of enabling your great adversary to gain over you a decisive and a permanent advantage. Let there be nothing that approaches to the assembling of ourselves together, let our attendance on the preaching of the word grow rare, and let us either systematically or very frequently absent ourselves from the table of the Lord, and by thus bringing ourselves under the ban of a voluntary excommunication, we cannot practically be far from that of the judicial and the literal; and therefore in our measure we deliver ourselves to Satan. If any representation can warn and arouse those who live in the almost habitual neglect of the public means of grace, who undervalue those means, making sermons mere pieces of rhetoric, and sacraments mere symbols or signs, it must, we think, be that which contrasts those who have access to sermons and sacraments with those from whom that access has been judicially withdrawn, and sets forth, on the ground of this difference, the one class as in the kingdom of Christ, and the other class as under the power of darkness. And if anything can lead those amongst you who value the ordinances of the church, and who are accustomed to come to them as to the instituted channels of grace,—if anything can lead you to attach greater worth than ever to the public means—if anything can induce you to wait upon the Lord with increased fervency and frequency, in and through the appointed services of the sanctuary,—if anything can enable you to enter more thoroughly into the feeling of the Psalmist, who envied even the sparrow and swallow, who had made themselves nests in the house of the Lord—ah! surely it will be the finding, that in the judgment of the apostle the being authoritatively cut off from the communion of the visible church was the being so consigned to spiritual danger, so surrendered to the malice and might of spiritual foes, that the Corinthian offender, when thus excommunicated, could only be described as delivered or given over to Satan.

But we have yet some very interesting truths to derive from our text, on which our foregoing remarks have in no degree touched. You are to observe that whenever sentence of excommunication was passed it was with the double view of removing a scandal from the church and leading the offender to contrition and amendment. It was as truly in charity as in judgment that excommunication was pronounced, as much in the hope that the transgressor would be convinced of his sin as for the sake of delivering the church from stigma and reproach. You see this indicated by the words of St. Paul; for he speaks of the incestuous person as "delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh," with a view, as we may understand the expression, to his being brought to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts"—"that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." And there is no difficulty in here understanding how the process adopted was likely to produce the desired result. When a man found himself cut off, on account of certain parts of his conduct, from those with whom he had heretofore been closely associated, it could hardly fail but that he would be moved to serious reflection, to inquire into his guilt, and pray for pardon and restoration. How beautiful is the well-known instance of the Emperor Theodosius, whom St. Ambrose repulsed from the doors of the church at Milan!—the church being still pointed out to strangers, as memorable for this fine instance of episcopal courage. The Emperor had just arrived from Thessalonica, where he had inhumanly ordered the slaughter of seven thousand men, without distinguishing the innocent from the guilty. Having but little sense of the crime, he was about, according to his custom, to enter the church, that he might join in its services; but the noble bishop, aware of his approach, met him at the gates of the sanctuary, told him boldly of his sin, and bade him depart, as unfit, with the blood of men upon his hands, to partake of the sacred mysteries. The Emperor was confounded; the ecclesiastical censure roused the slumbering conscience; he trembled at finding himself judged unworthy of communion with the church; he went to his palace as one distracted at heart; for eight long months did he shed penitential tears, and not until he had shown the most genuine repentance was he again allowed to enter the church; and when he found himself once more within the sacred precincts, so overcome was he with the remembrance of his guilt, and so vehement in his desire for the forgiveness of God, that he fell upon his face to the earth, exclaiming in the words of David, "My soul cleaveth to the dust; quicken thou me, according to thy word." And who shall doubt that if there were now any strong public way of branding error and vice, so that the heretical and immoral were held up to shame, the effect would be that of vastly diminishing these enormities, and of bringing their perpetrators to sorrow and amendment?

Yes, the being delivered to Satan might be "for the destruction of the flesh," and for the life of the soul. Observe carefully this peculiarity in the passage. How strange it sounds, that a man should be delivered to the devil, "that he might learn not to blaspheme," as St. Paul says in the parallel passage! It may be, we occasionally ascribe too much to the influence of the devil, and excuse our own sinfulness by pleading his power; but at least our apprehension, yea, our just apprehension of Satan is that of a being consummate in malignity and enmity towards God, and whose grand effort it is to bring every member of our fallen race to join him in his rebellion, and to share with him his perdition. Who, then, would ever think of the devil as teaching a man righteousness—teaching him not to blaspheme? Who, if he supposed an individual placed especially for a time under the influence of the apostate leader, would imagine that individual coming forth from the deadly discipline with a hatred of sin, and a resolve to abandon corrupt and inveterate habits? Yet this—so admirable and so vast is the overruling power of our God, that power by which he makes all things and all agents subserve and help forward his purposes—this is what is actually effected. The unclean person is delivered to the devil, not, as you might think, that he might be confirmed in his uncleaness, but for the destruction of the flesh and the salvation of the spirit. Marvellous instance of the Divine power, or, it may be, marvellous proof of the completeness of that victory which Christ Jesus achieved, when "through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil!" Satan, the great adversary of God, is made to act as his servant, and the inciter to lust as the tutor in mortification! How can this be? In what way can the discipline, so to speak, of the devil be instrumental to the teaching man to overcome the flesh? My brethren, you are to remember that the case pourtrayed in our text is that of a man debarred from the ordinances of religion, and therefore left without those defences against Satan which are to be gained by a careful use of instituted means; and what is Satan so likely to do with such persons as to fill them with fearful despondency, to excite in them thoughts of horror, and to suggest to them that now, salvation being hopeless, they may as well rush at once into every enormity? I do not say that there may not be occasions in which Satan will succeed, for of course the severity of excommunication would not always produce the sincerity of repentance; but I can believe that very frequently Satan's attempts will frustrate themselves, and that the produced effects will be just the reverse of the expected. Horror of mind may not always end in despair; it may teach a man the difference between the being in fellowship with God and the being separated from him; and this felt difference is precisely adapted to the urging the sufferer to efforts at regaining the forfeited communion. We may quite suppose that in many an instance the temptation to sin may produce repugnance to sin; the suggested impiety will cause a shrinking or recoil of the soul, and thus the power which is urging on an individual to wickedness may be instrumental to the effecting his retreat. We may appeal, it may be, to the experience of some of our hearers for evidence that herein we speak only truth. There are those of you who, though using faithfully the ordinances of grace, suffer greatly from the assaults of the devil. Our malignant adversary is continually injecting vile thoughts into your minds, and tempting you to sins which from the heart you abhor; but do you not find that those vile thoughts make you pray the more earnestly for purity, and that the temptation only gives in your eyes additional heinousness to the sins which you already detest? This indeed is turning Satan's weapons against himself; and if there be one thing which should comfort those who are afflicted by the blasphemies, the impurities, the impieties which they find frequently presented to their minds, it is the knowing that all these may through God's help be instrumental to the working in them a greater conformity to the image of Christ. Yes, we may well use our text for the encouragement of numbers who are harassed by the assaults of the evil one. Dark thoughts of God gain entrance you know not how; wild and wicked imaginations, mysteriously born, take possession for a time of the soul; you are moved, you can scarcely tell whence, to do or say things reproachful to the holy name by which you are called. Oh! it is indeed hard to bear; yet be of good cheer. You may be persuaded that it is not only by the permission of God that the devil has power to assault you—you may be sure that God is just making use of the devil to discipline you in righteousness. His base suggestions are to render you more in love with holiness; his temptations to apostacy are to cause you to cling more tenaciously to the cross of the Saviour; yea, you may be sure of this, seeing that when his apostle, acting in his name, delivered over the Corinthian offender to Satan, he delivered him "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

"In the day of the Lord Jesus." How remarkable is the continual recurrence of the apostle to one particular day, in which he seems to expect the consummation of all his hopes! He does not always define the day, but as though there were but one day for which a Christian could be looking, he speaks of it as "that day," and adds no explanation. In the immediate prospect of departure from earth, when he had exclaimed, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course," he added, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day." Elsewhere he describes believers as "looking for that blessed hope," and yet he had not been speaking of any hope; here he mentions "that day," and yet he had not been speaking of any day. Thus also in our text—"the day of the Lord Jesus." But many had already been the days of the Redeemer—many too of deep and signal interest,—the day of birth, the day of death, the day of resurrection, the day of ascension; yet, as though these were comparatively unmarked by mighty significance, he speaks of some other day as "*the* day." "In the day of the Lord Jesus." We need not tell you what this day is—"the day of the Lord," which "shall come as a thief in the night." But would that our minds, especially now in passing through the season of Advent, were so fixed on that day, so intent on the re-appearing of the Lord our Redeemer in power and great majesty, that like the apostle we felt as though all time were gathered into that single space! Then, when with the clouds for his chariot, the archangel's trump for his heraldry, a thousand times ten thousand spirits for his retinue, the Man of Sorrows shall approach this earth, and summon forth the children of the first resurrection, then shall be emphatically the day of salvation. The apostle, you see, speaks of the spirit as being "saved in the day of the Lord Jesus;" as though salvation must be incomplete whilst the body is in the grave; as though the Redeemer's mighty work were but partially applied, while death still retained any power over man! Then will you be of those who long and look for "the day of the Lord Jesus?" How emphatic are the words of the apostle—"Them that love his appearing!" Do the words describe ourselves? He alone loves Christ's appearing who would love the instant annihilation of sin, and the spread of holiness over the whole face of society, and who, feeling the painfulness of protracted combat with evil, would love to be altogether detatched from the solicitations of sense and the promptings of passion. Examine, then, yourselves; see what your feelings are in regard of "the day of the Lord Jesus"—whether you long for it because you long for perfect emancipation, both in body and soul, from the dominion of evil. Ah! we have spoken of being "delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh:" God grant that we may all now so wrestle with the devil, that we be not hereafter delivered to him as those who have neglected the great, the precious, the free salvation which is in the Lord Jesus Christ!

CHRIST, THE CENTRE OF THE PROMISES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 16, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.,

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

> "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."—2 Corinthians i. 20.

WE had lately occasion to refer to our blessed Lord's conversation with the two disciples whom, after his resurrection from the dead, he met on the road to Emmaus.* You will remember how it is said of the effects of this discourse, that the hearts of the hearers "burned within them, while he talked with them by the way, and while he opened to them the Scriptures." It had been a very large and comprehensive discourse; for we are told, that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." No doubt the Redeemer showed how he himself was the antitype to every type and the theme of every prophecy; but we believe he must also have shown how he himself was associated with every promise, as well as with every prophecy of Scripture. And this truth it is which is broadly asserted in the words of our text, and which we are anxious on the present occasion to set plainly before you; for it cannot be other than matter of great moment to every one amongst us, that he should have right views on the promises of God. Living as we all by nature do under the wrath of our Maker, incapacitated from rendering to that Maker any acceptable service, it is certain that unless blessings be offered to us as free gifts, they can never come within our reach; and it mightily concerns us to ascertain whether God have promised any blessings to our race, through what channel they are to flow, and what conditions may be annexed to their reception.

There is no difficulty in determining that God has promised much to the fallen. You can scarcely read a page in the Bible, without finding words which shape themselves into an encouraging declaration, which amount to an offer of help, or convey an assurance of some unmerited benefit. Well might St. Peter speak of there being "given unto us exceeding great and precious promises;" for there is not the case of spiritual sadness nor of temporal calamity, there is not the evil by whose dread we can be afflicted, nor the good by whose hope we can be excited, which does not form the subject matter of some Divine saying, constructed so as to serve as a word in season, and meet the feeling then uppermost in the mind. The risk, then, is not that of our overlooking the promises, but rather that of our taking them without warrant to ourselves, and of our failing to examine whether they are rightly appropriated. These promises are so numerous, they so bear the impress of unlimited generosity, they address themselves so accurately to the varied circumstances of human condition, that we may easily be induced to suppose ourselves the parties to whom they are made, without duly considering whether we satisfy the conditions which may be annexed to their performance. And perhaps nothing is better calculated to exhibit the glory and the fulness of the promises, and at the same time to guard us against their hasty and unwarranted appropriation, than the considering the personage in whom all promises centre, or from whom they diverge, and shed light round man's pilgrimage. It is this which our text will naturally lead us to do; for St. Paul there sets before us Christ as alike the foundation and accomplisher of all the promises of God. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen." When it is said that the promises are "yea" in Christ, the meaning seems to be, that they have their existence in Christ, that they have been made in Christ, so entirely on his account, and with reference to his person and work, that had there been no Christ there could have been no promises. Then when it is said that all the promises of God are "Amen" in Christ, the meaning evidently is, that they have all their fulfilment in Christ. Whatsoever God has promised in Christ, whatsoever, that is, is "yea" in Christ, he hath alone accomplished in Christ. He hath made it, that is, "Amen" in Christ. So that we may give as the sum of the apostle's statement, that God has promised man nothing but in Christ, and that all which he has thus promised is also fulfilled in Christ. He then adds, that this arrangement is for the glory of God; implying that promises thus made and accomplished secure honour to our Maker, as well as advantage to ourselves. Such, we think, is, generally, the purport of our text; and from this you will readily understand what the truths are which we are anxious to set forth. In the first place, we have to show you that all the promises of God are made in Christ; in the second place, that they are all fulfilled in Christ, and that they are "Amen" in Christ; and we must then, in conclusion, endeavour to prove that all this is to the glory of our God.

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* See Penny Pulpit, No. 2,662.

I. Now, you are well aware that there have been two heads or representatives of our race, and that these have acted and been dealt with by the Almighty not as single persons, but as the whole human kind. The first was Adam, who as the father of all men stood federally in their place; the second was Christ, who, having assumed human nature, whilst his person was Divine, might justly be reckoned with as representing the species. Adam unhappily yielded to temptation; and this head of our race, into whose keeping had been delivered the interests of myriads upon myriads, entailed a curse on the family of man, and sent down to its remotest sections a depraved nature, and the wrath of the Almighty. And when the whole race had thus fallen in their fallen representative, there were no blessings and no mercies for which man could look. Humanity had become so necessarily and entirely exposed to vengeance, that there was no room whatsoever for promise. Of course we do not mean that God could no longer engage to bestow gifts upon man, for indeed with the commission of the crime came the promise of forgiveness; but this was only because the second representative was appointed, and we now simply speak of results which, had there been no such appointment, must have followed the transgression of the first. We describe these results as necessarily including the interruption, or rather the destruction of all intercourse between earth and heaven, so that on man's side there was no place for prayer, and on God's side no place for promise. "Indeed," you may say, "there was still room for promise; God might have looked down compassionately on the wretched estate of his creatures, and have covenanted out of his own unbounded generosity to secure them from their self-wrought destruction." It is true, he might have done this; yea, and we bless his holy name, it is true that he did do this; but only through the appointment of a second representative. He might have cheered, and he did cheer, the outcasts from Paradise with assurances, that though they had deceived themselves their case was not desperate—with intimations that he would not finally "deal with them after their sins, neither reward them according to their iniquities." But if he might have done this, and if he actually did this, it was only because there had arisen a new head of our race, with whom he could enter into covenant. He could make promises to the unfallen Adam, because no attribute of his nature opposed the exercise of the largest loving-kindness, when its object was the obedient and the innocent: but he could not make promises to the fallen Adam, because it consisted not with the perfections of God that favour should be shown to the rebellious and the impure. If, therefore, he promised at all, he must covenant with the new head—with one who might put the race he represented into such a moral position, that it would no longer be at variance with the Divine character to extend to it the offers of friendship. And when his own Son undertook to be this new head of our race, so certain was it that a full and perfect satisfaction would be made to his justice, that God could immediately throw open to man the riches of his beneficence, and deal with him as with a being who stood within the possibility of forgiveness and immortality. But if this be the true account why, after his transgression, man could still be the object of the promises of God, is it not emphatically true that all the promises of God are "yea" in Christ Jesus? There could have been no promises, it appears, had not the Word, which was "in the beginning with God, and which was God," stood forth in the fearful moment of human rebellion and undertaken the Suretyship of the beings who had just woven death, and woe, and shame into their portion. The Creator could have extended no favour to his creatures—he could not have bent down from the throne of his splendour to cheer them with a solitary hope, he could have painted no rainbow in the clouds with which they had darkened their firmament, had not a Representative willing to pledge himself to fight man's battle, and to exhaust man's curse, and able to redeem the captive from the mighty, stood in the gap, just as mercy seemed about to depart from the earth, and shown her that she might remain, and yet bless the lost. Then, indeed, was there room made for promise. God could engage to bestow on us, for the sake of his Son, countless and glorious blessings, to which otherwise we could have had no title; nay, rather, which God would have been dishonoured by placing within our reach. And are not, then, all the promises "yea in Christ Jesus?" "All;" for if every good in this life and in the next were forfeited by sin, and if none had been recoverable, none attainable, except through the Suretyship of Christ, oh! who can question that every promise must issue, as it were, from our second representative—yea, must be graven on his cross and written in his blood? And what is this but saying, that "all the promises of God are yea in Christ Jesus?"

And if you examine the promises which at various times God gave as lights to scatter the gloom which gathered round the earth, you will find that it was in union with Christ, on account of Christ's merits, that these gracious encouragements were vouchsafed to the fallen. We cannot profess indeed to prove this of every promise of Scripture. We believe it of them all; but with so unbounded a profusion have its promises been scattered through the Bible, so various are the occasions of their delivery and the blessings to which they relate, that it were to show ignorance of their nature and their multitude to attempt to compass them within a single inquiry. But we may at least select a few, and give them as specimens, or rather take those which are the fullest and most general, and consider them as including the smaller and more personal. So soon as man had transgressed, it was in the form of a promise that prophecy took the span of time, and gathered into a sentence the moral history of mankind. But the promise was a promise in Christ. Christ was emphatically that "seed of the woman" by whom it was declared that the serpent's head should be bruised; and when, therefore, our first parents, lingering on the borders of Paradise, and reluctant to quit the scene of their happiness, were cheered by the announcement of a victory yet to be won over their tempter and destroyer, was not this announcement so dependent on the Mediator, so made on his account, and with so distinct a reference to his interference and suretyship, that when regarded as a promise it must be as a promise which was "yea in Christ Jesus?" And afterwards, when one people was to be separated from the rest of the world, that they might be the depository of the oracles of God, by what promise was their faith encouraged? from whom did it derive its worth, or even its existence? "In thy seed," said God to Abraham—and that seed, the apostle tells us, was Christ—"in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Take away Christ, and what remains of this promise? Is not this promise "yea in Christ Jesus?" The father of the faithful, when, following the biddings of God, he forsook his home and wandered in a strange land, was sustained by a declaration which took for granted the whole work of mediation, which was so actually "yea in Christ Jesus," that the moment you put the Saviour out of sight the promise is extinguished, and it conveys no pledge of favour. And when you look into the Old Testament, and observe the rich and numerous promises made to the Jews, you find those promises all in some way associated with their expected Messiah. There is not, perhaps, a single assurance, whether of national or individual deliverance, from which you would not take all the point, or rather, whose performance you would not make impossible, were you once to prove that no Redeemer had covenanted to stand between God and ourselves. There is a marvellous variety of these promises; many of them have been at least partially fulfilled in past times; but the most glorious and transcendant are bound up in the future, and we expect their accomplishment in the season on which prophecy has poured out all its magnificence. But whether fulfilled, or still waiting fulfilment, they have all manifestly been constructed with a reference to Christ. Beautiful are the words, when God saith to his people, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee:" but in whom has this promise any existence, unless in Christ? It follows on the declaration, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee." It is therefore, because redeemed, that God can give his people assurance of protection and security. And forasmuch as they are redeemed only by Christ, so it is only in Christ that the promise is "yea." Or if Isaiah breathe a bolder strain, and describe Jerusalem rising in her majesty—"Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders;" "the glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together;" "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundations with sapphires:" whose name gives life to all this imagery? and on whom rests the hope that what is so splendid in description will yet be displayed upon the earth? Are not these the terms in which the nation is addressed, even whilst the prophet exhausts language in sketching her glories—"I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David?" And we know who this David is; we know that this is he whom the Son of Jesse did but typify, the "Prince of Peace" on whose "shoulder the government" was to be laid. We know, therefore, also, that since the covenant made to the nation is "the sure mercies" of this David, the promises of that covenant must be the promises which centre in Christ. And they may speak of sovereignty and of triumph, of "the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah," of the flocks of Kedar," of "the rams of Nebaioth," but we are certain there is not a word in these glowing announcements, which was uttered without reference to Christ, not one which could have been uttered had there been no Christ; not one, that is, of which we may not declare that it is "yea" in Christ Jesus." And, assuredly, when we turn to evangelical promises, those in which we ourselves are especially interested, we do but find increasing reason for assent to the statement of our text. What is there which we can affirm promised to us in the Gospel, which is not promised on account of Christ's merits, and as a result of his mediation; which would not cease to be promised, the moment you could prove that we were not redeemed? "Blessed," exclaims St. Paul, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." And again: he thus describes himself—"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." Nay, he says of godliness—and we know that godliness is the having Christ "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"—that it "hath the promise of the life which now is and of that which is to come;" thus giving whatsoever is promised of both worlds, the visible and the invisible, when the Saviour is received by faith into the heart. We need not try to prove to you that it is only through Christ that admission is to be gained into the kingdom of heaven. We will assume your assent to the rule, that all the mercy offered in the better covenant under which we live is all mercy offered for the sake of him who "died the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" and if all that produced it is derived really and truly through Christ, is not the promise "yea" in the Saviour? If God covenant that he will blot out our transgressions, and not remember our sins, is it not because Christ "bare our sins in his own body on the tree?" Could there be a promise of forgiveness irrespective of the great propitiation? If God covenant to bestow his Holy Spirit on those who seek the assistance of this Divine Agent, is it not in the name of Christ, that every petition must be presented? And what shall we say of a promise which is thus practically of no worth except as associated with Christ, but that it is a promise which is "yea" in Christ Jesus? It is promised, that "all things shall work together for good" to the church; it is promised that God shall "bruise Satan under our feet shortly;" it is promised that "death shall be swallowed up in victory," and that "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," shall be the portion of those who "fight the good fight of faith." But is there one of these promises, comprehensive as they are of all that can be longed for by beings conscious of immortality, which is made to any but such as believe in Christ Jesus? Indeed, they are the promises of God; they come to us in the words of the everlasting Father, and the impress of Divine truth is on their every syllable; but all the while they bear such reference to the incarnation, atonement, and intercession of Christ, they so presuppose faith in every one to whom they are made good, that evidently they have been spoken by God only as covenanting with the head of our race; and therefore it is that they are all "yea" in Christ Jesus. Thus out of all that assemblage of gracious and encouraging declarations which make Scripture inestimable as a storehouse of joy and consolation, you cannot select a solitary sentence of which you may pronounce that it would maintain its truth and preserve its integrity, if you were able to prove that no atonement had been made. Therefore is it that if tears are to be wiped from the eyes of the sorrowing, if the darkness of the grave is to be scattered, if the weary and heavy laden, sinking under the felt burden of sin, are to be consoled and lightened, if lustre is to be thrown over the future, so that whilst tied down to earth men may contemplate joys laid up at the right hand of God, then indeed you may turn to the Bible, and find passages so apposite that they seem written on purpose for the instance in question. But oh! you have only to cast doubt on the existence and work of the Saviour, and immediately the tear flows again, a gloom is around the sepulchre, and iniquity presses heavily, and there is no longer the hope which is full of immortality. We look, therefore, to Jesus, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," and we feel that it was for his sake alone those precious promises have been made which adapt themselves so wondrously to every circumstance of human condition. We feel that there could have been no engagement on the part of the Almighty that his sun should rise on the evil and the good, that the vallies should laugh with abundance, that he would be a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless—none that he would pardon the penitent, none that he would receive back the prodigal, none that we should be strengthened for moral warfare, none that the sting should be extracted from death, none that the dust of the buried generations should be quickened, none that the forfeited immortality should be regained, if duly sought, had there not been a representative of human kind, with whom, in thorough consistence with every attribute of his nature, God could enter into covenant, and that covenant one of peace to the rebel and love to the unthankful. Ah! then, if apart from Christ there can be offered no balm to the wounded spirit, no rest to the disquieted, no cordial to the fainting, no hope to the dying—if God must have kept silence, or breathed no words but such as syllabled calamity, why, when we read promises which gather within their sweep whatsoever we can need as sojourners upon earth, whatsoever we can desire as perishable beings, there is but one confession we can make, and this it seems impossible to withhold—that "all the promises of God are yea in Christ Jesus."

II. Now let us consider the second part of the apostle's assertion—that "all the promises of God are Amen in Christ Jesus." We have already given as the explanation of this statement, that whatsoever has been promised in Christ is alone accomplished in Christ. The epistle to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans begins thus—"These things, saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness;" and since Christ is here the speaker, we understand him as declaring, in exact conformity with our text, that he fulfils or verifies the several purposes or pledges which have been made in him to mankind. Christ is "the Amen," as establishing or making good all those gracious declarations which would never have been uttered, had he not undertaken our suretyship. His work has put the Amen to every promise, just as his engagement caused that promise to be made. There are two ways in which the promises of God are "Amen" in Christ. The one is, Christ hath died for us; the other is, Christ intercedes for us. It was emphatically in dying for us that Christ stamped certainty on every promise of the Almighty; for it was his death, as we have already explained, by which the engagements were fulfilled into which he had entered with the Father. This death accomplished the conditions on which God made the promises. They were not made directly and immediately to ourselves; for when men had rebelled there could have been no intercourse with him, except through a Mediator. They were made, therefore, with the representative or head of our race, he covenanting to make reparation to a violated law, and God covenanting to accept the vicarious obedience and show favour to the lost. And it was especially by death that the reparation was made, and thus the Mediator's part in the engagement fulfilled. The solemn words "It is finished," pronounced by Jesus, as he hung, an ignominious spectacle on the tree, were a declaration that all which had been assumed in the giving of promises was performed; and the mighty earthquake which followed was as the "Amen" of the Creator, affirmative of the engagement which he had made through the Son; and now when we would urge on a sinner that he use the "exceeding great and precious promises" with which Scripture abounds for his comfort and encouragement, and that he consider himself addressed in these words of loving kindness which light up every page of the Bible, it is to the sacrifice upon Calvary that we must perpetually recur, if we would scatter the doubts by which he is assailed. We know that it is enough to fill us with amazement to find, that the Omnipotent against whom we have rebelled, and who, if he spoke to us at all, could be expected to speak nothing but the language of rebuke and condemnation, is yet sending us messages, which are eloquent of tenderness, and throwing open all the riches of his grace, and inviting, yea, entreating us to approach and receive blessings which no human thought can measure nor obedience deserve. Yet why should we be amazed? Why tempted to regard promises as though too glorious to be addressed to ourselves? The just cause of wonder is not in the splendour of God's promises, but in the gift of God's Son. The death of Christ—with this would we repress every doubt, disperse every fear, and uphold ourselves in the belief that nothing which has been promised is too great to be performed. Why should any amongst you who are willing to receive mercy on the terms of the gospel be perplexed by the freeness or the magnitude of the offer? Why do they not rather turn from themselves to the Saviour, and contemplating the stupendous achievements of Calvary decide as they must, if they attempt to count up the worth of the atonement, that all the promises of God are "Amen" in Christ Jesus? And we should add to this, that by the intercession and death of Christ man has a right to every promise of God. He ever lives to plead the merits of his passion, and to send down to earth what those merits procured; and of such importance is his intercession to the fulfilment of promises, that the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit, though especially predicted, could not be vouchsafed till he had taken his seat on the right hand of God. "The Holy Ghost," said St. John, "was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified;" and before his ascension our Lord directed his disciples to wait at Jerusalem till they should receive the promise of the Father; and in reference to this command St. Peter expressly said, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Indeed, the general representation of Scripture is, that as the result and reward of his sufferings Christ has been endowed with all power in heaven and earth, and made "head over all things to the church." "Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men." Whatsoever was obtained for us by his obedience and death has been delivered into his keeping, so that as an Intercessor he has those treasures at his disposal which he purchased as a sacrifice; and well, then, may the promises be declared to be "Amen" in Christ Jesus; for if all the blessings which form the subject of these promises are in the hands of the Redeemer, undoubtedly the fulfilment of the promises is assured to us in him, and we have only, in any moment of doubt and misgiving, to remember that Christ has been exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, and that too on purpose that he may dispense the mercies which God covenants to bestow on the world when redeemed, and we gain at once the strongest ground of confidence, that if we ask we shall receive all for which the Divine Word has been passed. By dying in our stead Christ rendered it, if we may use the expression, obligatory upon God that what had been promised should be given, whilst by interceding on our behalf he secures the donation in each separate case, and on both accounts it may justly be affirmed, that the promises of God are verified or made certain to us in Christ; and this is saying, in the words of our text, that these promises are "Amen" in Christ Jesus. Yes, both "yea and Amen!"

III. But what says the apostle finally? This he declares to be "to the glory of God by us." The whole scheme of redemption published to the world by the ministers of the gospel is the grandest manifestation of Deity, and produces most honour to our Maker. It is, moreover, the concentration of this scheme in the person of the Saviour, so that for his sake alone were the guilty originally spared, and through his merits alone are they finally rescued, which renders it so conspicuously a source of glory to the Creator. His grace is manifested in the making a covenant and in fulfilling the promises of the new covenant, whilst both the making and the fulfilling should be in and through his well-beloved Son, this wonderfully displays the wisdom which could arrange and the love which could appoint the mode in which we may be saved. It was for the glory of God that when man had transgressed, and there was but a step between him and death, mercy rejoiced against judgment, and words full of hope were spoken to the apostate; and it is for the glory of God that a way lies open by which all who will may approach him without fear, and find grace to help in every time of need. But the glory is mainly in the fact, that it has been made possible, consistently with the Divine attributes, that favour should be promised and extended to sinners; and since this is derived exclusively from the substitution and satisfaction of Christ, it follows that through nothing is God so much honoured as through his promises being "yea and Amen" in the Redeemer.

This, however, is but a general statement: it should be our business, before we conclude, to show you somewhat more personally how the promises of Scripture bring glory to our Maker. St. Peter, after describing these promises as "exceeding great and precious," ascribes to them the very largest measure of sanctifying energy. "That by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the pollution which is in the world through lust."

St. Paul also, after fixing the attention of the Corinthians on the inspiriting declarations of prophecy—declarations which set forth the Almighty as engaging to be our father, and to receive us as his sons and his daughters, utters the exhortation—"Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Such is undoubtedly the tendency of promises made and fulfilled in the Redeemer. The sense of obligation to the Being in whom these promises are "yea and Amen," the knowledge that we have no right to appropriate them, except so far as we strive against sin—the elevated joys, the noble employments, the stupendous dignities on which they fix this hope, and thus draw off the affections from what is earthly and perishable—these all combine to the rendering promises the most efficient of engines in that moral renovation which is the work of God's Spirit; and certainly our Maker is then especially glorified, when in obedience to his command we resist temptation with the greatest energy, overcome evil, and endeavour to be holy even as he is holy. If, therefore, the direct tendency of the promises of Scripture be to the promoting our sanctification, it follows that these promises must be to the glory of our God; and the practical question which each of us should consequently put to himself is, whether the promises work in him this their legitimate result. Mind, you have no right to take these promises to yourselves, and to conclude that you shall share in the blessings which they hold out, unless there be a sincere and ever-growing effort to "resist the world, the flesh, and the devil." Oh! it is not whether we have an ear for what is rich and beautiful in sound—it is not whether we can be allured and fascinated by a brilliant description of repose, and gladness, and strength, and victory. All men would desire to be comforted in trouble, sustained in death, and crowned in eternity; the alone question, so far as interest in the promises is concerned, is whether the hope of heaven nerve us to the labouring after holiness. The promises are to the glory of God; but they are not to his glory, if they produce not resistance to evil. And therefore we are bound to say of all who live in unrighteousness, whatever their profession of trust in Divine mercy, that they are still "strangers from the covenant of promise." I pray God that we may all apply such a test to ourselves, lest we learn at last that threatenings, as well as promises, are "Amen" in Christ—that whilst through him as Mediator God will show mercy to all who repent, through him as Judge he will pour wrath on the disobedient and the hypocrite! May the promises of Scripture be comforting to your hearts! But in order that they may with justice be this, they must be sanctifying to all your lives. Then indeed they will be found "exceeding great and precious." There must be sorrow, in order to their sweetness being felt; just as there must be night, in order that the stars may be seen. But God "comforteth them that are cast down;" and care and trouble, carried to Christ, will but be found to minister peace and to multiply happiness. Oh! that we may all, by taking refuge in Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life," experience for ourselves, amid all the changes and chances of this mortal scene, what the Psalmist expressed, when he exclaimed—"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

CHRIST THE THEME OF PROPHECY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON TUESDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 23, 1856,

BY THE REV. HENRY MELVILL, B.D.

(Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty, and Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's,)

AT ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, LOTHBURY.

"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."—Revelations xix. 10.

I SHALL have some difficulty in gathering within a single discourse all that I now wish to say to you. You are aware that this is the last sermon that I shall have to preach in this place. I am to-day to resign into the hands of another that office of lecturer which I have been permitted to hold and enabled to fulfil for the last seven years, and naturally there are a few parting words which I should not only wish to utter, but from which it would be hardly right for me to abstain. But I must not confine myself to personal matters, when the season demands a special topic. The day is close at hand, fixed from all eternity in the counsels of God—the day which prophets and kings and righteous men desired to behold, and whose shinings, seen dimly in far distant ages, gladdened the patriarch Abraham, as he stood on Mount Moriah, and received back his son in a figure from the dead. Yes, the day is close at hand, when the trumpet shout shall be heard—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given;" yet a few more hours, and there shall cross the horizon of this earth that Sun of Righteousness which is to rise upon the nations with healing in his wings. But a few more hours, and there shall be planted in the desert of this fallen creation that tree of life which is to bear twelve manner of fruits, and yield its fruits every month. I cannot, then, part from you at such a moment as this, without striving more especially to fix your thoughts on that blessed, that glorious Redeemer, whose birth the church is just about to commemorate. And if the discourse should serve to lead any one of you to keep Christmas with loftier views of Christ and heartier love to God, then, whatever may have been the faults and whatever the deficiencies of my ministrations in this place, I shall still have cause thankfully to feel that I have not altogether run in vain nor laboured in vain. Last Tuesday we addressed you on Christ Jesus as the substance of all promise.* "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen." To-day we will address you on Christ as the theme of all prophecy. How can you be better prepared for Christmas, than by having your contemplations turned on him who was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea—as that august, that wondrous being, of whom all the prophets spake, and through whom alone could promises be breathed to a fallen creation?

The words of our text were addressed by an angel to the Evangelist John. They are very large and general; there is no exception made. Whatever the subject matter of prediction, the text claims it as a witness for him; whosoever the prophet, he is to be reckoned amongst those who bore testimony to Jesus. The words may, indeed, with equal fairness be inverted, and their meaning will be still more apparent: "The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus." According to this reading, prophecy however variable, and whatever its immediate topic, has but one object, that of giving testimony to Christ. Thus also St. Peter, in his address to Cornelius, says of the Redeemer, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him should receive remission of sins." And yet undoubtedly there are many predictions of the Bible in which we cannot profess to find a strict testimony to Christ; and if we were referred to each prophet to find an express prediction accomplished in Christ, we should probably be somewhat at a loss. The writings, for example, of Nahum and Zephaniah seem to contain nothing that amounts to a distinct prophecy of the Messiah; there are undoubtedly allusions to the times of the gospel, but there is no prophetic declaration of which we are bound to say that it expressly belongs to the person and work of the Mediator, and yet it is evident from our text that something may be drawn from these prophets, as well as from Isaiah, who sketches with such wonderful accuracy whatever should befall the Messiah. Let us see, then, how this is to be met. Let us take in our hands the prophets of the Old Testament, and let us examine whether in one way or another they do not give such testimony to Jesus as would bear out the assertion, "The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus."

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* See Penny Pulpit, No. 2,685.

Now, we have allowed that there are parts of the prophetic Scriptures, it may be, whole books of the prophets, of which it cannot be proved or even pretended, that their accomplishment is to be sought in things done or endured by the Redeemer. You find numerous predictions in Scripture, whose fulfilment must be traced in the rise and fall of the kingdoms of the earth; the figures with which the prophetic page is often crowded are those of conflicting armies, and overthrown cities, whilst the war and confusion thus outlined belong to countries and to times apparently unconnected with Christ; but, if you observe carefully you will perceive that prophecy deals with the fortunes of no nation which is not in some way associated with the church. You might be disposed to say when considering prophecy, as it was, fulfilled in the rise and fall of far distant empires: "These predictions are wonderful, but they do not bear witness to Jesus." Examine, however with a little more attention. Can no reason be given why these empires should be specified, though others of greater magnitude are not noticed? We should bear in mind that it is not the greatness of an empire which will account for its selection by the spirit of prophecy; no doubt the Persian, Grecian, and Assyrian were very great empires, but it may be questioned whether they exceeded that of the Saracens or of the Turks, when those powers were at their height; and yet the three former, but not the latter, are woven into the prophetic visison. The solution of the difficulty may be found in the fact, that from these empires alone, amongst all the kingdoms of the world, could a knowledge be woven which would give dates to the time of the Messiah. Hence whilst dealing with the fortunes of heathen nations, and describing revolutions which seemed to belong exclusively to the nations themselves, so that when the things foretold are the fortunes of cities, whose very name would almost perish ere the Saviour appeared, there may be as distinct a reference to the coming of this Saviour as would bring them under the description of a witness for Christ. Thus you find a great part of the prophetical writings occupied with the fortunes of Assyria, of Egypt, or some other idolatrous nation; but you may generally discover that the foretold occurrences were in some way to affect the children of Israel. It is certainly worthy of our attentive observation, that whilst the prophets of the Old Testament treat largely of the affairs of various nations, the nations are those with whose history that of Israel is closely mixed up. Hence though the topic of prophecy may be the fall of Babylon or the conquest of Egypt, and may not clearly relate to the annals of the Hebrews, we are still at liberty to class the prophecy with those that refer to the chosen people of God—as a prophecy that was as much delivered, and as much adapted to instruct the Jews and give them notice of things in which they were concerned as any of those which specially described their condition. And when you have admitted that such prophecies are to be classed with those that belong to Israel as a nation, you have also admitted that they give witness to Christ; for I need not remind you that the family of Abraham was separated from every other people, on purpose that in the midst of idolatry they might be witnesses for truth, and a depository of prophecies in which the whole world had interest. From the beginning of their history they bore testimony, as you know, to a coming Messiah. All their institutions, moral, ceremonial, and political, concur in this grand attestation, and they were all along a people of miracle, and on that very account they would take the prophecies of God's word and fix them on the personage whom they professed to expect. And, therefore, you should consider yourselves as listening to a succession of men who rose as instruments for maintaining the peculiar character of the Jewish dispensation. It was by living under the immediate government of God, that the Jews obtained and kept so distinctly the position which made them, from the first, the witnesses of Christ. But that they should be instructed by prophets was a natural, if not a necessary part of the dispensation under which they lived, and afforded a manifested token of Divine interference. And if prophecy thus contributed to the introducing and upholding a dispensation which rendered the Jews the great heralds to the world of a Deliverer to be born in the fulness of time, why, there can be nothing clearer than that in delineating national prophecies the prophets performed the part of witnesses for Christ; so that whether they spoke of what should come to pass in Jerusalem, or poured forth their strains in descriptions of the victories and defeats of heathen nations, they were effecting the mighty result that a whole people through many generations should stand out as a harbinger of the Redeemer of man, and therefore were they furnishing by their every announcement the material for verifying the assertion of our text: "The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus."

Now it will be seen that by this, which is nothing but a simple argument, we bring within the scope of our text those predictions which we should at first have been disposed to exclude; but it is not by such reasoning alone that we shall prove that our text holds good—prove, in fact, that all the prophets testify of Christ, even when the subject of the prophecy is the rise or fall of some infidel power. I am quite aware, you will naturally turn to such writings as those of the prophet Nahum, a prophet who appears to have been wholly or mainly employed in describing the downfall of Nineveh, a city which had disappeared from the earth long ere the coming of Christ, and you will be inclined to urge, that however such a prophet may have spoken by inspiration, no prophecy from his lips bore witness to Christ. But we may assert in reply that Nineveh as well as Tyre and Babylon are introduced into prophecy as types or representatives of the enemies of the church. The Jews were all along a typical people, emblematical of that church which should in after times be gathered from many nations and many tribes. Hence these enemies and oppressors of the typical people are to be regarded as figures and types of the enemies which oppressed the church. So that when prophecy exults in the overthrow of Babylon, and Israel is represented as startled at the fall of the imperious city, we have more than the fall of any kingdom, and we have more than the emancipation of a solitary people. We carry our thoughts on to yet distant times, and identify the visions of Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Nahum as the vision of the overthrown foes of a nation passing before us, and identify them with those of St. John in Patmos, who beholds the ascending smoke of the mystic Babylon, and hears the anthem of jubilee from an emancipated creation. It is scarcely possible to read with the least attention the prophecies which speak of ancient Babylon, and compare them with those which describe the yet future doom of all anti-christian powers, and not be struck with a sameness of delineation, which plainly shows that although a partial accomplishment has come to pass, a day has yet to dawn—a day of long-delayed vengeance, when the awful words of the seer of Israel will be fully and finally verified. It matters nothing whether or not the prophets themselves, as they poured their denunciations on the enemies of their country, anticipated a more signal ruin, and felt that they sketched a Mediator's triumphs; the true magnificence of the prophecies will be seen in the final fulfilment of the language which rendered their descriptions if not inapplicable, yet exaggerated, when supposed to refer only to events on the eve of occurrence. Babylon, Egypt, Nineveh, and Moab—these are but types of that arch despotism which, enlisted indeed in every age, will muster itself against Christ's church in all its tremendousness as the close of the present dispensation draws nigh. And when I hear of those cities and countries devastated by war, and depopulated by famine, it is not enough for me that I can search the page of history and see with how truthful a fidelity their condition answers to the prophetic announcement; I must regard them under their typical as well as prophetical aspect; and then is it, when the Redeemer is coming forth to resume the government of creation, and the strange work of wrath goes forward in the downfall and defeat of the infidel nations, who are found ranged under the banner of anti-christ, then, I say, only is it that the events are commensurate with the sublime figures of Isaiah, and the burden of prophetic woe descends in its immenseness to the earth. And beyond question, if it be true, that predictions which refer primarily to the destruction of ancient and idolatrous kingdoms belong in their fulness to the final discomfiture of every enemy of Christ's church, why, we must be warranted in declaring of the prophets who uttered these predictions that they gave witness to Christ. And thus it is that prophecy assumes a consistent shape, that all its scattered rays are gathered into a focus. The formation and support of the church under the present dispensation, the various efforts that will be made for its desolation, the partial successes of its enemies, the final and complete triumph, when Christ shall appear in his might and tread the wine-press in his wrath—these constitute that majestic history which sometimes faintly and indistinctly, and then again with surprising vividness, is delineated in far back ages of the world. The immediate theme of prophecy may indeed be the seige of a city or the overthrow of a state; but to ourselves, at least, who are privileged with the whole of revelation, it is evident that the beseiged city or the overthrown state represents yet mightier conquests and more stupendous victories. In the ruins of Babylon we are taught to behold the defeat of anti-christ; so that as ancient prophets pass through the lands which were inhabited by the enemies of Israel, and announce the vengeance by which they should be speedily overthrown, we hearken to strains which tell of deliverances to be vouchsafed to Christ's people and effected by Christ's interference. What then? Centuries may have gone by since the prophets swept the cords to the story of battle and of conquest. The notes of their strains may have told of nothing to the listeners in Jerusalem, but the march and defeat of some monarch at whose power they trembled; but we hear in their every effusion the resistless advance of the Lord our Redeemer, and knowing that it is the Captain of our salvation appearing at the last as the Deliverer of his church whom they hail as "coming from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah," we give in our assent to the accuracy of the description—"The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus."

Now, my brethren, I have thus examined the case of those prophecies which appear to contain no distinct reference to our Lord, and have advanced reasons in support of the opinion that they must nevertheless be classed by Christ among the things concerning himself. We shall not hesitate to assert, that in the mass of prophecies the reference to Christ is so clear and explicit that it is scarcely possible to suppose that it could be overlooked. We hardly know, if it were not that infidelity is of all things the most credulous—we hardly know how the witness of prophecy could fail to convince. Without arguing on the indirect testimony which we affirm to be given by all prophecy whatsoever, even though the theme may be the destiny of cities which perished from the earth long ere Christianity arose, let us turn to predictions which relate expressly to Christ, and who shall reckon their number or who shall estimate their force? It were scarcely too bold an assertion, that if compelled to admit that in the prophecies already considered there was no witness to Christ, they bear so insignificant a proportion to those in which the testimony is indisputable, that "all the prophets" must still have been used when our Lord sought to expound the things concerning himself. We almost fear to venture even on a summary of these predictions. It is like epitomising the whole volume of Scripture, so interwoven are they with every part and parcel of revelation. You know that so soon as Adam fell prophecy took the span of time, and gathered into a sentence the history of mankind. In the announcement made to the serpent respecting the woman—"it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel," there was contained, as you all know, a sketch of the conflict between evil and good, of which this earth has from the first been the scene—a conflict carried on throughout under the leadings of the Mediator, decided by his marvellous interference in the flesh, and which has yet to issue in the thorough subjugation of every power of darkness, and in the sublime enthronement of him who in the death-strife of Calvary trod the serpent under his foot. And then were patriarchs favoured with yet clearer announcements. Abraham learned that all the nations of the earth should be blessed in his seed, and Jacob saw the sceptre resting in Judah's hand till the Shiloh appeared amongst men, and when Israel was separated from other families of the world the nation grew prophetic, and its every institution heralded Christ. Of him spake every victim which died on the altars of Jerusalem, every hymn which echoed from its temple—yea, even in the wilderness he held his mysterious intercourse with the marked people, and predicted a deliverance under a mightier than Moses. Established in Canaan, the Israelites were instructed by a series of holy men who spake as they were moved by the Spirit of God; but if these seers laid open the future, it was mainly that the nation might survey their Messiah. All his actions and all his sufferings, the mystery of his birth, the ignominy of his death, the period of his coming, the splendid yet future results of his mediation, the doctrines which he would publish, the miracles by which he would confirm his pretensions, his rejection, crucifixion, birth, resurrection and ascension—all enter into the prophetic description, and that too with a minuteness which makes those descriptions as much historical as prophetical—the very price at which he should be sold, the vinegar and gall which should be offered him on the cross, the division of his garments and the casting lots for his vesture—these, which are almost inconsiderable particulars, being announced by the prophets with a minuteness which is only equalled by that of the evangelists. But yet greater events engaged their most fervent strains. The prophets of the older dispensation caught glimpses of glorious things which were to succeed, (yet perhaps at a long distance,) the sorrows of the Saviour in the moment of his humiliation. They often sung of the awful scenes of Messiah's death, and the consequent desolation of Israel, and then gazed on the spectacle of the whole earth rejoicing in Jesus, and the banished ones restored triumphantly to Jerusalem. And the prophets of the new dispensation took up and amplified these descriptions, and ere the canon of Scripture was closed God graciously condescended to deliver into the keeping of the church a summary of what should happen up to the end of the dispensation. The Book of Revelation, full as it is of sublime figure and difficult parable, is nevertheless a sketch whose accuracy is increasingly demonstrated as prophecy becomes history—a sketch of the condition of Christianity from its first publication to its final victory; and if there be much in this book that will need completion ere it be fully understood, we can at least be sure that its every page is eloquent of Christ. The theme, from the beginning to the end, is the majesty and the might of the risen Redeemer. He goes on conquering and to conquer; the angelic company do him reverence; the harps of heaven are swept to his praise. The enemies of his church gather to battle, and are consumed by the brightness of his appearing; the clouds are piled for his judgment-seat, and the allotments of eternity are awarded by his decisions. And what can you say of such a series of predictions! We have led you from the day of creation to the day on which the new heavens and the new earth are to take the place of the old; prophecy has covered the vast expanse, and filled it everywhere with Christ. It seems to have had no other occupation but that of delineating the Mediator. If fearful visions pass before the seer, it is Christ in his anger or Christ in his vengeance that give them force; if glowing prospects, freighted with universal happiness, it is Christ, the Redeemer of saints, or Christ reigning with his saints, that irradiates the panorama. We heard the first breathings of prophecy in Paradise, and they spoke to us of Jesus; we went into the homes of patriarchs, and found them rejoicing to see Christ's day; the name of the Saviour has been echoed to us from the desert and the city; wheresoever the prophet has trod, there hath he testified of Christ. In the din of battle we have been told of his vengeance; in the anthems of gratulation we have listened to his praises; in the painting of the magnificent we have beheld his triumphs. The fate of empires hath often, indeed, engaged the musings of the prophets, and they have described to themselves the revolutions that either have been or shall be; but whilst almost confining themselves to the office of the inspired historian, they have never lost sight of the Redeemer. Kingdoms are overthrown in the prophetic annals, that way may be made for the kingdom of Christ; and when the globe is shaken and strewn with the fragments of empires, it is that an obstacle may be removed to the final mastery of Christ's enemies. Oh! it is a survey on which we love to linger, though the longer we gaze on it the more are we bewildered at prophecy directing itself to the one object—Christ. That prophecy should almost furnish the history of the world, and yet that all the while it should be a history of Jesus; that every seer, in every age, should have beheld the Redeemer, and that too, whether the vision before them was of Christian times and Christian lands, or of the ages and realms of idolatry, that there should have been what we may call a subserviency of the whole march of human affairs to the manifestation of God's Son in the flesh, and that whilst inspired men were gathering their notices of Christ from the convulsions of mightiest monarchies, and exhausting language in describing a world subject to his dominion, they should descend into all the minutiæ of geography, and make the insignificant important by their attention—we can only account for these wonders on the principle, that all things were created by Christ, and for Christ; and if there remains much that is inexplicable, much at least, that must overcome us by its greatness, we cannot return from the survey of Christ, all in all, to those who were commissioned to weave the future into the present, without confessing to a truth of which there can be no debate: "That the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus."

Now, up to this point we have endeavoured to show you that there is in all prophecy, whatever its more immediate subject, so distinct a reference to the Redeemer of men, that our Lord, in his journey with his disciples to Emmaus, wishing to lay open in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself, might justly gather "all the prophets" within his comprehensive discourse. But we may now suppose you agreed on the fact that the grand design or end of all prophecy is to bear witness of Christ; and there are two or three inferences which may obviously be drawn from this fact.

We would first observe, the true idea of prophecy—an idea which should be kept steadily in view whilst you peruse the predictions of Scripture—is derivable from this truth, that in "all the prophets" Christ found the things concerning himself. Men are apt to assume as the sole purpose of a prophecy the giving men notice of some coming event. They do not look to any ulterior purpose, and they are therefore surprised if the prophecy seem obscure when the event has occurred, or if the correspondence between the two be not every way accurate; and certainly the predictions of Scripture will not always answer to the tests which men think it fair to impose. Many of these prophecies remain mysterious, though we know their accomplishment, and the events to which others are referred are scarcely commensurate with the terms in which they are announced. But all this is to be explained by the fact, that "the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus." If it had been the business of a prophet simply to tell men beforehand the issue of a seige or a battle, it might have been expected, and we should probably have found, that all obscurity in description would have been removed by the occurrence, and that the two would have corresponded in every particular. But if, on the other hand, it be the object of prophecy to tell men indeed beforehand of the seige or the battle, but so to shape the prediction that it shall also bear witness for Christ, you may fairly expect that whilst the historical event is sufficiently indicated, much will be introduced which arises solely from the ulterior testimony. Indeed, there is much to excite our admiration, when we study the events predicted, and compare them with events in which they find their fulfilment. To be able, as we are in a variety of instances, to read the fortunes of nations in both prophecy and history, this supplies Christianity with a standing miracle, and places us on as fine a vantage ground in our combats with infidelity as though we could appeal to wonder-working power yet possessed in the church. We envy not the man, be his intellectual endowment ever so great, who can read of the conquests of Alexander and the wars of his successors, and yet not feel that the Spirit of the living God spoke by Daniel; and he who can study Josephus, and not own that superhuman foresight was manifested by Christ, when sketching the disasters of Jerusalem, appears to us so inaccessible to evidence that we should despair of working any moral impression, if the winds obeyed us and death fled at our bidding. And yet, after all, it is not when studying the predictions themselves that you view prophecy under its most imposing and interesting aspect; the sublimest contemplation is that of all prophecy converging into one point in the person and work of Jesus. He began "at Moses and all the prophets." With Ezekiel in my hand, I should look with amazement on the once splendid Tyre, turned into a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; and instructed by the descriptions of Isaiah, I should walk in silent admiration amid the ruins of imperious Babylon; but more eloquent would be the waves of Tyre, as they break where palaces had stood, and more penetrating the voice from the sepulchres of the mighty, if I had learned to view Ezekiel and Isaiah as the heralds of Christ, so that in their predictions of the desolations of Tyre and Babylon I find mention of him who was to have such power over the nations that as the vessels of a potter should they be broken in pieces. Neither is it only the wonderfulness of a system directing itself through so many centuries and so many channels to a single object, by which we shall be struck, when we find that "the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus." Is it true that from the very beginning of the world prophecy delineated this one person, and as though the deeds and triumphs of this person filled the counsels of heaven, every vision of the future which God vouchsafed to mankind had respect to his appearance and office? Then how great must be the dignity of the person, and how sublime his undertaking! I know of nothing which should more impress us with a sense of the majesty of the Mediator and of the stupendousness of human redemption than this concentration in Christ of the thousand lines of prophecy. Who is this on whose behalf remotest ages sprang into being, whilst time was yet in its infancy, for the heralding whose approach empires yet unheard of rose and climbed in magnificent imagery, and whose achievements both of wrath and of mercy crowd the scene which still stretches in the untravelled hereafter? And what is the undertaking which seems to have required all the carefulness of God—for the gradual revelation of which he broke the silence of eternity, and spake through various voices to his creatures—for whose accomplishment he sent a being so august that even the future could not rest in its depths, but must struggle into life to do him reverence? Oh! there will be much to witness against us, if we think lightly of Christ and redemption. It will be true in another sense besides that originally intended, that the men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment and condemn us, if we believe not in the Mediator and accept the deliverance offered in his blood. Nineveh shall witness against us, and Tyre, and Moab, and Babylon will come up from their ruins, and testify how in their overthrow and desolation they gave proof of the truth of revelation, and declared to mankind that Jesus, of whom all the prophets spake, was anointed of God to save the penitent and to crush the disobedient. It can be no trifling thing to neglect Christ. It is, I might almost say, to raise against ourselves the hills, and deserts, and waters of this globe. Prophecy peals from them all with testimonies for Jesus. What marvel, then, if, finding at the judgment, the whole visible creation prepared to demonstrate and denounce our infidelity, we shall call on the mountains and the rocks to fall on us and to hide us? Oh, while it is called to-day, hearken to the voice which, in predicting Jesus, announces him as the Deliverer of the fallen, who came to redeem us and to shield us from future and everlasting wrath!

Would that none might refuse! Would that you all might have a happy Christmas—happy in that Christ is not only born in Bethlehem, but formed in your hearts the hope of glory? Can I breathe a better wish for you? Can I part from you with a kinder or more Christian sentiment?—for part from you I now must. I now must bid you an affectionate farewell. I heartily thank God that I have been so strengthened for the duties of this Lectureship as never in any one year to have been absent a single Tuesday, except for a few weeks of summer recreation. I am painfuly conscious of many faults, many deficiencies in my ministrations amongst you. May God forgive them, and prevent their working any injury to my hearers! But I still trust that my labours may not have been wholly in vain, and that some seed, if ever so little, may have been sown, which will yet bear fruit in another world. I shall not attempt to deny that I have felt a great and a growing interest in these our weekly assemblies. I have not been insensible to the rich moral beauty of the spectacle which this church has presented. I doubt whether it has its parallel. Here, in the very midst of the din and bustle of commerce, within a step of the Bank, the Exchange, and those vast establishments which actuate and regulate the trade of London—not on a Sunday, but on a week-day, when the streets are full, and the counting houses open, and the shops and marts alive with traffic,—here have large numbers regularly assembled to pray to God and hear his word, witnessing, I might almost say, for eternity where there is most risk of its being forgotten, and for the true riches where there is most danger of their being neglected for others which perish in the using. Yes, I have not been insensible to the moral beauty of the spectacle; but it would be sad indeed to think that our crowded assemblings have had no other worth. God grant that this be not what the day of judgment shall declare! And if there be those of you to whom I have ever been enabled to speak a word in season, let me ask of them not wholly to forget me, when I am removed from this place, but to remember me sometimes in their prayers to Almighty God, that I may be strengthened for such duties and such trials as may yet remain to me. I heartily thank you all for the patience and attention with which you have listened to my lectures. It is one disadvantage of the position which I have occupied here, that it affords little or no opportunity to cultivate the acquaintance of any of one's hearers. In one sense we part, as we met, almost strangers the one to the other; but we are not, I trust, strangers in a higher and a better sense. There are bonds between us which will not, I hope, be rent in sunder. We may all be members of the one family which in heaven and earth is named with the name of Christ. I will not trust myself to say more. May God abundantly bless you all—bless you individually, and bless you in your families—bless you in this life, and bless you in the next! Farewell! Farewell!

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